Commentary

April 2003

The Folly of Containment

Robert J. Lieber

Making Iraq Safe for Democracy

Efraim Karsh

A Scientific Scandal

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À la Française

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Books in Review

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Letters from Readers

Wire Wars

To the Editor:

Peter W. Huber's article, "Telecom Undone—A Cautionary Tale" [January], is a specimen of a genre that is growing like kudzu and is just about as useful: namely, the factually-deceptive diatribe against all the policies of the 1990's that produced a growing economy characterized by innovation, competition, new jobs, and confidence in the viability of the American Dream.

The new negativists, of whom Mr. Huber with his wildly inaccurate assertions is an example, would have readers believe that investment and innovation can come only in consolidated, and preferably monopolized, markets—because only in settings where returns are certain will capital be put to work. Hence, they urge government policies that create highly concentrated markets and that promote the interests of stockholders in firms already dominating those markets. For instance, they would favor a plan to benefit a firm returning reliable dividends over an alternative that would encourage investment in research-and-development of new products and services with which to challenge incumbents.

The recent stock-market bubble and its subsequent bursting unhinged many. But the sleep of reason, it is said, produces nightmares. It would truly be a nightmare if the United States were to move in the direction of static, consolidated markets and away from the stomach-churning, innovation-driven policies of competition, demand-stimulus, and job creation. It was the latter sorts of policies that lay behind the many successes of the telecommunications sector in the 1990's. Those successes still endure. Even after the bust, the information- and communications-technology markets are much bigger, more innovative, and more capable of new growth than they were before the policies blasted by Mr. Huber were adopted in the 1990's. The way to encourage these markets to new surges in size, dynamism, and job creation is to learn from and replicate the successes of the 1990's. I will mention here three, each of them enormous in scope and scale.

First, in 1993 Congress ordered the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to auction wireless licenses. In doing so, the agency created a robust industry that offered steadily lower prices to steadily increasing numbers of subscribers, with steadily increasing total revenues. This industry is now on the verge of earthshaking new advances focused on wireless transmission of data, in addition to providing wireless voice for local and long distance to more than 128 million customers. Every year, more subscribers are added. In all these respects, America is at last catching up to Europe.

The emergence of new wireless local-area networks now promises to extend the age of wireless into data transmission. Many incumbent service providers will be challenged by the new technologies. But whereas Mr. Huber's approach would lead to the conclusion that this is a problem for government to solve, the policies adopted in the 1990's lead instead to the conclusion that government should encourage the competition, lower costs for the industry (such as by distributing spectrum more widely and cheaply), and enjoy the benefits—jobs, productivity gains, economic growth—without trying to arrange for the incumbents to defeat their new rivals.

Second, in 1996 a bipartisan Congress ordered a bipartisan FCC to create "wireline" (as opposed to wireless) competition against Bell companies in the local voice market and new competition against AT&T and others in the long-distance

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market. After six years of delay, caused principally by lawsuits that resulted in major victories for the FCC, state utility commissions have at last crafted rules that permit rivals to attack Bells in the local residential voice market. Meanwhile, the FCC has let the Bell companies enter the long-distance market.

All of this, except for the litigation delay, is what Congress wisely ordered and what the FCC, in a series of virtually unanimous bipartisan votes, translated into pro-competition rules. These rules—derided by Mr. Huber—helped produce a 44-percent increase in telecom-services revenue from 1997 to 2003; huge growth in the volume of data and continued growth in revenue attributable to data; an increase in jobs among all service providers; and decreases in the prices of every kind of service. The only exception has been an increase in the price of local voice communications, but even that is beginning to change as companies improve their systems, efficiencies, and offerings. Meanwhile, capital investment in the industry was 50-percent higher in 2002 than in the period before 1996; as a percentage of total revenue, it is above historic levels. In short, everything that should be up is up, everything that should be down is down.

The third success story unmentioned by nattering nabobs of anti-Clinton negativism is the Internet. Technological talent, coupled with FCC policy, put Americans on the Web more cheaply and more quickly than has occurred in any other country. More than 50 percent of all homes and 90 percent of classrooms are connected to this new medium: it would seem that some government workers, together with a wave of innovation driven very significantly by entrepreneurs in start-up firms, did something right!

The competition story never ends. Innovation must never cease. Static markets shrink and die. The new challenge is to upgrade Internet access from narrowband (low speed over phone lines) to broadband (high speed over fiber or wireless), and to extend this to all Americans. To connect even half of all homes will require a demand-side stimulus program—which, if rightly designed, would refrain from designating a monopoly provider but instead foster competition, innovation, and consumer choice, using government aid to pay for the high-speed access.

In my view, it is the proper task of government to promote such a national broadband infrastructure, just as it did the interstate highway system, letting private firms compete for the construction job. This will require sage but bold government action. I have confidence that we can find the leaders to take such steps. The greatest risk generated by unwarranted criticism of the successful policies of the 1990's is not the bruising of the thin skins (or thick heads) of the authors of those policies. It is that we will not seek, empower, and, yes, hold accountable leaders to take us to greater heights of technological and economic success.

REED HUNDT
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Peter W. Huber persuasively argues that the 1996 Telecommunications Act was badly implemented by the FCC under then-chairman Reed Hundt, with disastrous consequences for the telecommunications sector. According to Mr. Huber, a chairman other than Mr. Hundt might have saved the American economy trillions of dollars.

But why did the mistakes of one individual at the FCC have more far-reaching economic effects than the combined mistakes of the heads of hundreds of other federal agencies? As I suggest in my forthcoming book, *A Tough Act to Follow*—and as I have reason to know from my service as an FCC commissioner from 1997 to 2001—the answer is that the Commission exercises the combined powers of all branches of government with unusually few limitations. Not only does the FCC write the rules governing the telecommunications sector, it also enforces them and adjudicates disputes.

Private parties, who regularly petition courts to insist that other agencies adhere to the rule of law, have often been too frightened of retribution to challenge the FCC. Yet when the FCC is challenged in court on matters related to the Telecommunications Act, it loses more often than not. Unafraid of the wrath of the courts, the FCC corrects its legal mistakes more slowly than the courts overturn its rules.

With each passing year, there is less rather than more legal certainty in the telecommunications sector. Montesquieu, Locke, and Madison were correct: the separation of powers is necessary for the preservation of liberty.

HAROLD FURCHTGOTT-ROTH
Washington, D.C.

PETER W. HUBER writes:

I do not favor monopolies, or "static, consolidated markets." But the rules Reed Hundt put in place during his busy tenure as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission do not promote competition, they promote the resale of existing "network elements" at microscopically regulated prices. "Competition" should mean new copper, glass, coaxial-cable lines, radio towers, and switches—not 10,000 pages in the Federal Register prescribing how Potemkin competitors may piggyback on someone else's facilities.

Congress did indeed order the auctioning of wireless licenses. Administering these auctions was the only significant wireless-related task assigned to Reed Hundt's FCC, and it was botched so badly that, to this day, huge blocks of spectrum remain snarled up in the courts. Most of the specific wireless policies t hat Mr. Hundt put into effect—including an elaborate system of preferences, bidding credits, and low-interest loans used to award licenses, a limitation on the amount of spectrum any one entity could own, and the requirement that cellular carriers continue to provide outdated analog services even after the emergence of digital ones—have been removed either by the courts or by Mr. Hundt's successors.

As for the assertion that the FCC "created" our robust wireless industry, it might be challenged by the engineers at Motorola, Nokia, and RF Micro Devices, who may suppose that the extraordinary advances they pioneered in radio

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Homicide bombings: *Beirut Marine Compound (10/23/83), Pan Am 103 (4/21/89), 1st World Trade Center attack (2/26/93), Khobar Towers (6/25/96), U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (8/7/98), USS Cole (10/12/00), World Trade Center (9/11/01)*

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technologies played a key role. And that is not to mention the thousands of construction engineers who erected radio towers across the country, or the millions of investors who provided the necessary capital.

Mr. Hundt attributes the rise of the Internet to "technological talent, coupled with FCC policy." Online "information services" were in fact completely deregulated in the 1970's and have not been touched since—hence that quaintly dated catch-all label, "information services," which regulators still attach to everything from Amazon to Google to your bank's automated teller machine. Mr. Hundt's FCC did vote in 1997 to continue the policy, adopted a decade earlier, of permitting Internet service providers to use the local telephone network without paying for it, and that policy undoubtedly did temporarily help depress prices for dial-up Internet access. But it simultaneously slowed deployment of high-speed services by forcing them to compete against the "free" alternative. Mr. Hundt's hand-picked successor, William Kennard, also voted to require local phone companies to provide a free high-speed conduit on their lines to competing providers like Covad. The FCC has now repudiated that policy.

Mr. Hundt says that in 1996 Congress instructed him "to create" wireline competition. It did nothing of the sort. Instead, it instructed him to open markets and let competition run its course. Mr. Hundt now urges Congress to subsidize additional investment in broadband facilities. But with the unqualified support of the very companies that stand to benefit from this investment—equipment and computer suppliers like Intel, Corning, and Lucent—a unanimous Commission found recently that the best way to promote additional broadband investment is through less government intrusion, not more.

Finally, Mr. Hundt asserts that court challenges to his rules "resulted in major victories for the FCC." The unbundling rules, from which everything else followed, were rejected twice: once, soundly, by the Supreme Court in 1999 and then—after the FCC ignored the Supreme Court and reinstated them—resoundingly by a federal appellate court in 2002. In February of this year, one maverick Republican on the Commission joined two Democrats in an attempt to impose Mr. Hundt's rules a third time, by delegating to state regulators the authority to keep them in place.

What will be the result? As Harold Furchtgott-Roth notes, the Commission has been handed a remarkably broad range of powers. But as he also cogently demonstrates in his forthcoming book, judges are now reviewing the Commission's handiwork more critically than they used to. Three current commissioners continue to act much as Mr. Furchtgott-Roth describes, proceeding on the assumption that the FCC can get away with anything by simply being more patient and persistent than the courts. When Mr. Hundt's rules make their third trip back to court some time later this year, those commissioners are likely to be proved wrong.

Left to Right

TO THE EDITOR:

Mark Falcoff's rather generous review of my work is too kind in one respect, misinformed in another, and misleading in still another ["Watching Christopher Hitchens," January].

I cannot claim credit for coining the now-current term "Islamofascism," though I did write in September 2001 that American society had just been assaulted by "fascism with an Islamic face." I slightly prefer the nuance of the latter.

As for the preposterous, vulgar remark maliciously attributed to me by my younger brother, Peter, to the effect that I would not mind seeing the Red Army watering its horses in the Thames, I never made it. Nor, while I am on the subject, did I ever make the statement attributed to me by Martin Amis—and cited in COMMENTARY by David Pryce-Jones [Books in Review, October 2002]—to the effect that Stalin only created food "shortages" in the Ukraine.

This is more than a matter of my word against theirs. In the first place, one can be either a Trotskyist or a Stalinist but not both: I was a member of one of the most intransigently anti-Stalinist "groupuscules." Moreover, if those were my views, they would have shown up somewhere in my more than three decades of writing and public speaking, and of course no such trace will be found or has ever been sourced.

It could be established, however, that I helped to organize a small protest in Cuba against the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, that I was present at one of the founding meetings of the Polish KOR (Workers Defense Committee) in 1975, that I wrote a pamphlet highlighting the work of the prescient East German dissident Rudolf Bahro in 1979, and that I was arrested and briefly detained at a meeting of Charter 77 in Prague in 1988. It is not my fault if my brother is a fanatic and a fool (Mr. Falcoff might have mentioned that Peter's slur was part of a high-pitched attack on Tony Blair's support for the war against the Taliban), or if for once in his life the brilliant but apolitical Amis failed to get the point of an admittedly arcane Marxist joke.

Finally, in criticizing *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, my little book on Kissinger's many offenses, Mr. Falcoff asserts that I distort the record with respect to the Nixon administration's involvement in Chile, and states that Salvador Allende would have been allowed to serve out his term as president if not for the many deformities of his regime. In my book, however, I produce documents that plainly show the orchestration of a plot to murder General Rene Schneider, a constitutional officer and political conservative who was opposed to a coup, *before* Allende had even been confirmed by the Chilean congress in 1970. If Mr. Falcoff, who cites his own "particular expertise" in Chilean matters, can refute this charge, he had better make haste. The general's family has brought suit against Kissinger in a federal court in Washington, D.C., and every paper for the prosecution is a declassified document of the U.S. government.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS
Washington, D.C.

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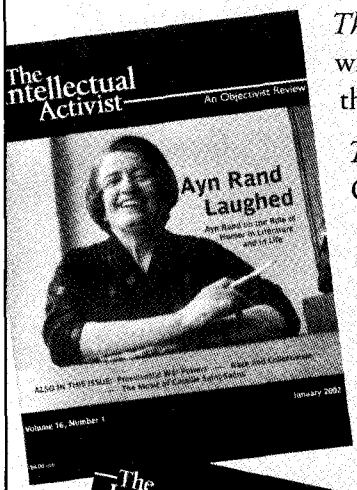

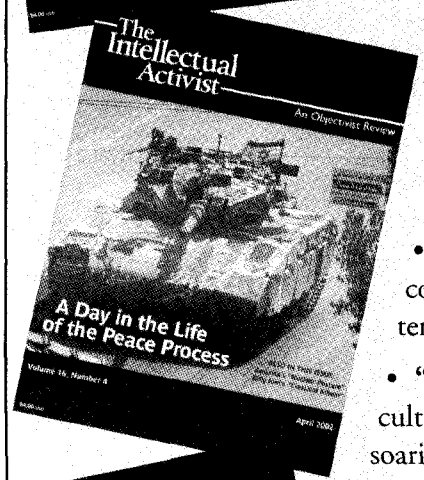

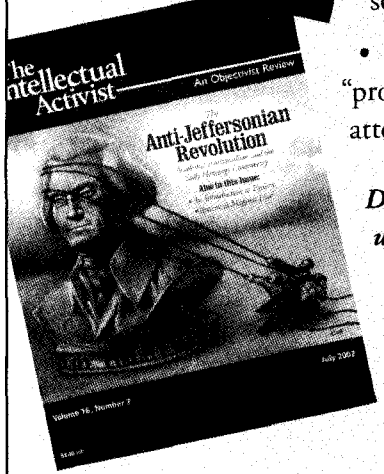

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TO THE EDITOR:

Mark Falcoff writes that, in the early 1970's, Chile's Marxist president Salvador Allende "allowed a free hand to squadrons of sinister 'security' operatives from Cuba and East Germany."

I had never heard this before. I have always considered the overthrow of Allende an after-the-fact example of "Eisenhowerism." Eisenhower failed to grasp that you cannot fight Communism by fighting democracy. In 1953, he helped to overthrow the legally elected government of Iranian premier Mohammad Mossadegh, and in similar fashion, he canceled elections in Vietnam in 1956 that were intended to unify the country after the French departed.

I sincerely hope that Mark Falcoff, who claims "particular expertise" on Chile, can tell us more about East German and Cuban activities there. I would be happy to learn that what happened in Chile was not another case of this failed policy.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
College of Staten Island
Staten Island, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Mark Falcoff writes that Christopher Hitchens and his brother argued about the merits of Communism "at about the moment the Reagan administration was deploying SS-20 missiles in Europe to counter the Soviet threat." But it was the Soviet Union—*not* the U.S.—that deployed SS-20 missiles. They were stationed in Warsaw Pact countries in the 1970's to intimidate Western Europe and to cause a split in NATO. The Reagan administration countered by installing Pershing II missiles in Western Europe in November 1983.

STEPHEN H. CHOPEK
Westland, Michigan

MARK FALCOFF writes:

I had better start by warning Christopher Hitchens that I may be forced to be even more generous to him in the future. Quite apart from the fact that he has been facing down the enemy at its epicenter in Berkeley, California, his recent articles have been superb. For example, in the London *Daily Mirror* (February 20) he ardently prayed for rain to dampen the "peace demonstration" there, which he characterized as driven by "clapped-out pseudo-Marxists who in their hearts have a nostalgia for the days of the one-party state and secretly regard Saddam as an anti-imperialist . . . assisted by an impressive number of fundamentalist Muslims who mouth the gibberish slogans of holy war but who don't give a damn for the suffering inflicted by Saddam on their co-religionists. A more gruesome political alliance," he concluded, "I have never seen."

Well, actually one has. During the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact (1939-41), many, many "Marxists," Trotskyists, and "leftists" of varying hues (among them the late Irving Howe, now a cult figure for the democratic Left in this country) subscribed to the notion that the true "imperialists" of the day were not the Nazis or the Soviets but the British, the French, and the Poles. One leftist who did *not* share that view was George Orwell. In that sense, Mr. Hitchens is in tandem with his hero.

Let me now turn to his specific comments. If Mr. Hitchens never made the remark attributed to him by his brother, his quarrel is not with me but with his sibling. But at no point did I suggest that Mr. Hitchens had ever been both a Trotskyist and a Stalinist. Not at all. What I would indeed say is that it is by definition impossible to be both a Trotskyist and an anti-Communist.

I can see that Christopher Hitchens has not read my book, *Modern Chile, 1970-89: A Critical History* (1989), so let me summarize its findings in connection with General Schneider. There was never a CIA plot—or, as far as I know, a plot by anyone else—to murder General Schneider, the commander-in-chief of the Chilean army. There *was* a CIA plot to kidnap him and send him off to Argentina for a season because he opposed the idea of a "legalistic" military coup that—in place of respecting the razor-thin electoral victory of the Marxist Salvador Allende—would have given Chile a provisional government for, say, a week. This would then have allowed new elections, in which the outgoing Christian Democratic president Eduardo Frei (1964-70) would suddenly have become freed of the technicality forbidding any president in Chile from running for two consecutive terms. Most people believed at the time (and still believe today) that in a two-man race between Frei and Allende, Allende would have lost.

As I point out in my book, General Schneider's murder was an accident. He pulled his pistol to defend himself from his kidnappers; they, mostly young amateurs, panicked, shot him, and fled. He died in a military hospital several days later. As it happens, the kidnappers were one of two groups the CIA was working with, although not the one selected for the kidnapping. They had gone ahead and acted on their own, as often happens in such cases.

But there is more. "The effect of the Schneider debacle," I write in *Modern Chile*, "was precisely the opposite of what was desired" by the CIA and the Nixon administration: "it transformed the victim into a martyr of the 'constitutionalist' traditions of the Chilean army; it encouraged other constitutionalist officers to support an orderly transfer of power to the new [Allende] administration; and it discredited right-wing cabals both in the army and outside of it." This happy situation would have continued right on to the end of Allende's term in 1976 had he followed a more moderate and sensible course instead of the one I described in my article.

I am well aware that there has been a massive declassification of documents relating to the U.S. role in Chile in the Allende period. As a matter of fact, I was invited several years ago by a State Department/CIA task force to brief the personnel who had been assigned to plow through the several boxcar loads of documents. I have followed their progress with interest. Nothing has come to light about the U.S. role in the Schneider affair that was not already known as a result of the Senate's Church-committee investigations as far back as 1972 and 1973,

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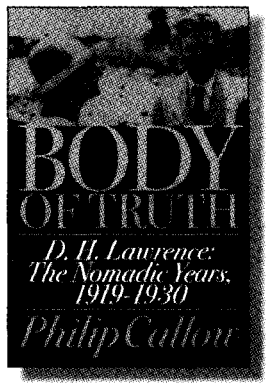
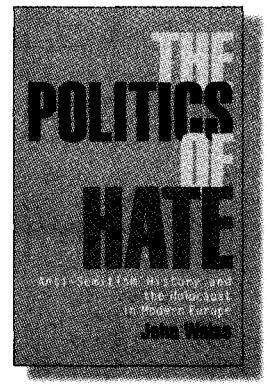
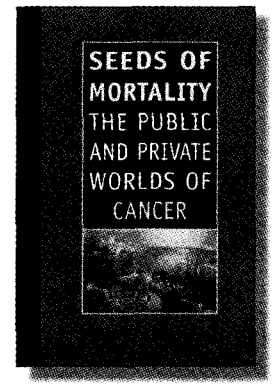
Four in hand







PHILIP CALLOW
Body of Truth

D. H. Lawrence's nomadic last years, 1919–1930, including his tempestuous relationship with Frieda and his relentless travels between New Mexico, Europe, and England, are brought to life in intimate detail in Philip Callow's new account. As Lawrence's disgust with the Western world grew more intense, he continued to respond to the demands of his art and, to the end, clung to his wife, the fundamentally married man he had always been. Mr. Callow's "prose is clear and easy and elegant, his observation sharp but kind and never superficial."
—V. S. NAIPAUL

RICHARD SCHICKEL
Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip

The celebrated film critic turns to a story of his own life—as a child growing up in a comfortable Milwaukee suburb during World War II. Weaving in the wartime films of Hollywood as a counterpoint to his own experiences, Mr. Schickel shows how they profoundly misled us about the nature of the war, our soldiers, our government, and the home front. "An engaging and entirely original anti-memoir....A wonderful, provocative book."—JOHN DUNNE. "Brutally honest and gracefully written...an important book and a necessary one."—MARTIN SCORSESE. "A wonderfully successful blend of personal and national history....It got its hooks into me from the very start."—RICHARD F. SNOW, editor, *American Heritage*

JOHN WEISS
The Politics of Hate

How anti-Semitism and racism developed as major elements in the European political process from the late 19th century to the Holocaust. Concentrating on the experience of Germany, Austria, France, and Poland (and by contrast Italy), Mr. Weiss traces the combination of ideas and national cultures that brought venomous consequences to political life and spelled difficulty and then doom for Jews. "A concise, clear-headed account...a refreshing and important book."
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STEWART JUSTMAN
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Taking exception to the contemporary culture of cancer, Mr. Justman separates the experience of the disease from the publicity. Arguing for humility in the face of an enigmatic challenge, he explores the cancer culture with a fresh perspective and telling references to great art and literature. "A brilliant book...from a 'cancer survivor' who wishes to do without slogans and illusions.... Here is literary discussion of the highest and, unfortunately, the very rarest order."
—FREDERICK CREWS

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and nothing establishes the facts beyond what I have recited above. I would recommend that the Schneider family find a better use for their money than spending it on pricey Washington lawyers.

Which brings me to George Jochnowitz. If this is the first time Mr. Jochnowitz has heard about East-bloc and Cuban involvement in Allende's Chile, he, too, needs to do some reading. The Cuban "diplomatic pouch" to Chile often took the form of huge crates containing weaponry, and Allende's personal security was handled by Cuban intelligence people. (His daughter, who ended up marrying one of them, later committed suicide in Cuba when she discovered he was already married.) The Cuban embassy in Santiago consisted of more than 200 people—roughly ten times the size one would normally expect. These and other details are available in my book.

I would also suggest that Mr. Jochnowitz look at the memoirs of Jorge Edwards, *Persona Non Grata* (1993); Edwards was the Chilean chargé d'affaires in Havana at the beginning of Allende's administration. He might also find edifying the recollections of Jorge Masetti, a former Cuban intelligence officer, titled *In the Pirate's Den: My Life as a Secret Agent for Castro* (2001). Nor would it hurt to consult Markus Wolf's *Man Without a Face* (1999), the memoirs of the former head of the East German secret police. Needless to say, these titles do not exhaust the possibilities.

I thank Stephen H. Chopek for correcting my slip of the pen.

Bioethics

TO THE EDITOR:

Gary Rosen focuses on the political opposition to Leon Kass, but the real issue is Kass's arguments themselves, not how they have been spun ["Who's Afraid of Leon Kass?," January]. Kass holds that cloning, some stem-cell research, and other new biotechnologies offend certain values, but he has no rational basis for elevating those values, except, ultimately, faith.

That is a problem, especially for public-policy recommendations whose justification is supposed to be accessible to citizens as such, not just to a select group of the faithful. In a country as highly diverse as the U.S., sectarian public policies generate hostilities; they impose elements of a faith on many who do not share the faith. That is when political nastiness comes into play. What is one to do about a faith one does not share except try to stop it from gaining political backing?

Perhaps Kass—and Mr. Rosen—would claim that there is no viewpoint or philosophy that is free of presuppositions whose truth cannot be demonstrated. But that is not so when it comes to chemistry or physics or even cosmology, where one can show the premises on which the discipline is based to be true at least beyond a reasonable doubt. Wherever premises rest on faith, consensus is not well-founded but accidental.

TIBOR R. MACHAN
Silverado, California

TO THE EDITOR:

As Gary Rosen rightly points out in his clear, fair, and insightful essay, human dignity is not as obviously threatened by biotechnology as Leon Kass believes. But Mr. Rosen is also right that liberals should not portray Kass as the bête noire of bioethics. Indeed, if anything, Mr. Rosen understates the attraction that Kass's moral views should exert for liberals like myself.

Though the boosters of biotechnology have ridiculed Kass's notion of the "wisdom of repugnance"—the visceral distaste on which he supposedly bases all of his moral views—they make similar emotional appeals, Mr. Rosen argues, when they invoke what he calls the "wisdom of compassion." I would add that liberals have feelings of repugnance, too. Many feel a visceral disgust about despoiling the environment, to take a leading example, and they are quite ready to base policy on these feelings. Yet it is rare to hear calls for rational explanations of these feelings.

Mr. Rosen's essay shows that Kass is ahead of liberals in this respect. Kass recognizes that inarticulate repugnance alone does not ground a moral view, and he turns to the concept of human dignity to articulate and justify his feelings. For Kass, human dignity is rooted in physical human nature—it is bound up with the terms of our "embodied" existence, with "our natural origins and attachments." Kass tries to evoke in his readers a kind of reverence (albeit qualified and limited) for what nature has ordained.

Those who identify themselves as environmentalists should at least be willing to listen to this plea. In many cases, concerns about environmental destruction cannot really be justified in terms of anything except reverence for nature—broadened from Kass's focus on human nature to include nature more broadly. Why else save the snail darter from sure extinction?

Kass's critics charge that appeals to human dignity stand in the same need of defense as feelings of repugnance. If so, the same must be said about the environmentalists' stance toward nature. Arguably, it can also be said about any of our fundamental moral commitments; at some point in our justifications we just plunk for what we care about. As the philosophers say these days, none of our moral views can be rationally justified "all the way down."

GREGORY E. KAEBNICK
The Hastings Center
Garrison, New York

GARY ROSEN writes:

Tibor R. Machan is certainly right that we should focus on Leon Kass's actual arguments rather than on how they have been presented—and distorted—by his critics. Having said as much, however, Mr. Machan proceeds to pluck from the shelf the most shopworn and hysterical of the charges against Kass: that his objections to various biotechnologies are nothing more than the expression of some deep-seated "faith," thus supposedly rendering him unfit for rational public discourse.

Mr. Machan does not say which of Kass's views he has in mind. In my own readings of Kass's work in bioethics, I have yet to come across an argument whose force depends on assumptions shared only by what Mr. Machan calls "a select group of the faithful." Kass does draw

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"Anyone who harbors doubt about the imperative of regime change in Iraq for the vital security interests of the United States should read this book."
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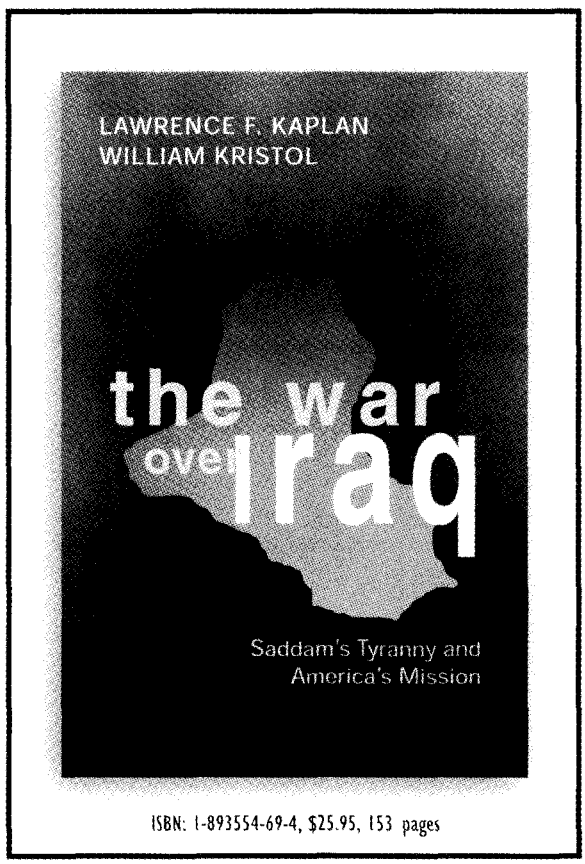
Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol look at Saddam Hussein and see the face of evil. In his Iraq, the children of those suspected of disloyalty have their eyes gouged out, and women are threatened with rape by secret policemen to extort support from their husbands. The authors show how minorities are dealt with ruthlessly, particularly the Shiites and Kurds, whom Saddam subdued with poison gas. The same genocidal techniques he used against his own people—nerve gas and cyanide—also characterized Saddam's war against Iran.



ISBN: 1-893554-69-4, $25.95, 153 pages

In addition to examining Saddam's brutality and the threat his weapons of mass destruction poses, Kaplan and Kristol analyze the failure of American policy on Iraq since the Gulf War. The first Bush administration regarded Iraq as a move on a diplomatic board game, and failed to remove Saddam when it had a chance. The Clinton administration subscribed to a brand of wishful liberalism that led it to avoid facing up seriously to Saddam's threat. But President George W. Bush, the authors show, does not intend merely to contain Iraq. Instead, he plans to liberate this benighted country, and create democracy in a place that for decades has known only tyranny.

Kaplan and Kristol provide a definitive analysis of the Bush Doctrine and how it is shaping a foreign policy that projects American influence on behalf of American interests and human freedom. They make the case for war. But they also offer a roadmap for a more hopeful future in Iraq, the Mideast, and the world.

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lessons about the human condition from the Bible, but he does so as a general reader, not as a believer in search of special revelation. He draws similar lessons from Aristotle, Tolstoy, and Huxley, writers whose confessional affiliations are unknown to me.

The fact that Kass's claims are more contentious and less demonstrably true than those of chemistry and physics does not mean, as Mr. Machan seems to think, that they amount to religious edicts. It simply means that ethics—like politics and philosophy—is not a strictly scientific discipline. Ideas about the human good cannot be mapped on a graph or distilled in a beaker. They must be discussed and argued over, in as disciplined, forthright, and rational a way as possible. This is precisely where Kass excels.

Gregory E. Kaebnick of the Hastings Center, the country's oldest and most respected bioethical think tank, takes his fellow liberals to task for failing to understand, or intentionally misrepresenting, what Kass means by the "wisdom of repugnance." Emotional reactions, Mr. Kaebnick argues, are an inevitable and often appropriate starting point for ethical discussion. I agree. If liberals want to revere the snail darter, that is fine by me, but (as Mr. Kaebnick seems to recognize) they still must offer reasons for making the trade-offs necessary to protect it, just as Kass has tried to explain why human dignity demands certain restrictions on possibly life-saving biotechnology.

A ground rule for such discussions should be a requirement of basic candor and precision in describing the goods at stake on both sides. In this, I am afraid, the liberal bioethicists for whom Mr. Kaebnick purports to speak have a pretty sorry record. If the most serious problem on the bioethical Right is a tendency to exaggerate the nature of the threat posed by new technologies—something for which I criticized Kass, as Mr. Kaebnick notes—the still graver problem on the bioethical Left is simple obfuscation, especially on questions relating to nascent human life.

In this regard, unfortunately, Mr. Kaebnick himself is a notable culprit. Earlier this year he could be found on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* arguing that so-called "therapeutic" cloning—cloning, that is, in which a human embryo is created solely for the purpose of extracting its stem cells for medical research, thus destroying it—is not even properly considered cloning, since its aim is not to allow "the new organism" to develop but to put it to "other uses." As he concluded, "in this case, it is outcomes, not laboratory techniques, that matter."

In the face of such sophistry, Kass has turned the President's Council on Bioethics into a much-needed whistle-blower, insisting that we debate these matters in language that serves to clarify rather than to evade. As the Council's recent report, *Human Cloning and Human Dignity*, observed, in a rebuff to those like Mr. Kaebnick:

> What shall we call the product of [cloning]? . . . [S]ome people recommend avoiding the effort to describe the nature of the product, preferring instead to allow the *uses we human beings have for it* to define its being, and hence its worth. But, for reasons of both truth and ethical conduct, we reject this approach as improper. We are all too familiar with instances in which some human beings have defined downward the status of other beings precisely to exploit them with impunity and with a clear conscience.

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SPRING 2003

A Tribute to William Phillips, Co-Founder and Editor in Chief

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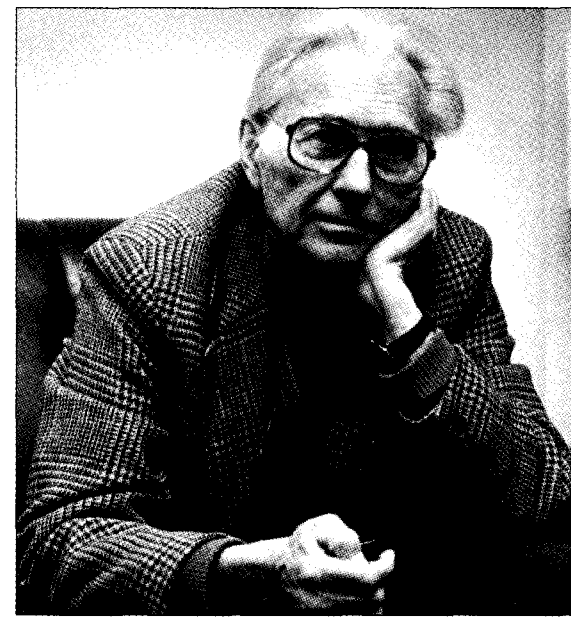
William Phillips (1907–2002)



William Phillips, who co-founded *Partisan Review* in 1934, strongly believed that the present rises out of the past and reaches into the future. He ensured that the magazine would stay on top of new trends without going overboard, while at the same time remaining aware of the historical roots of these trends.

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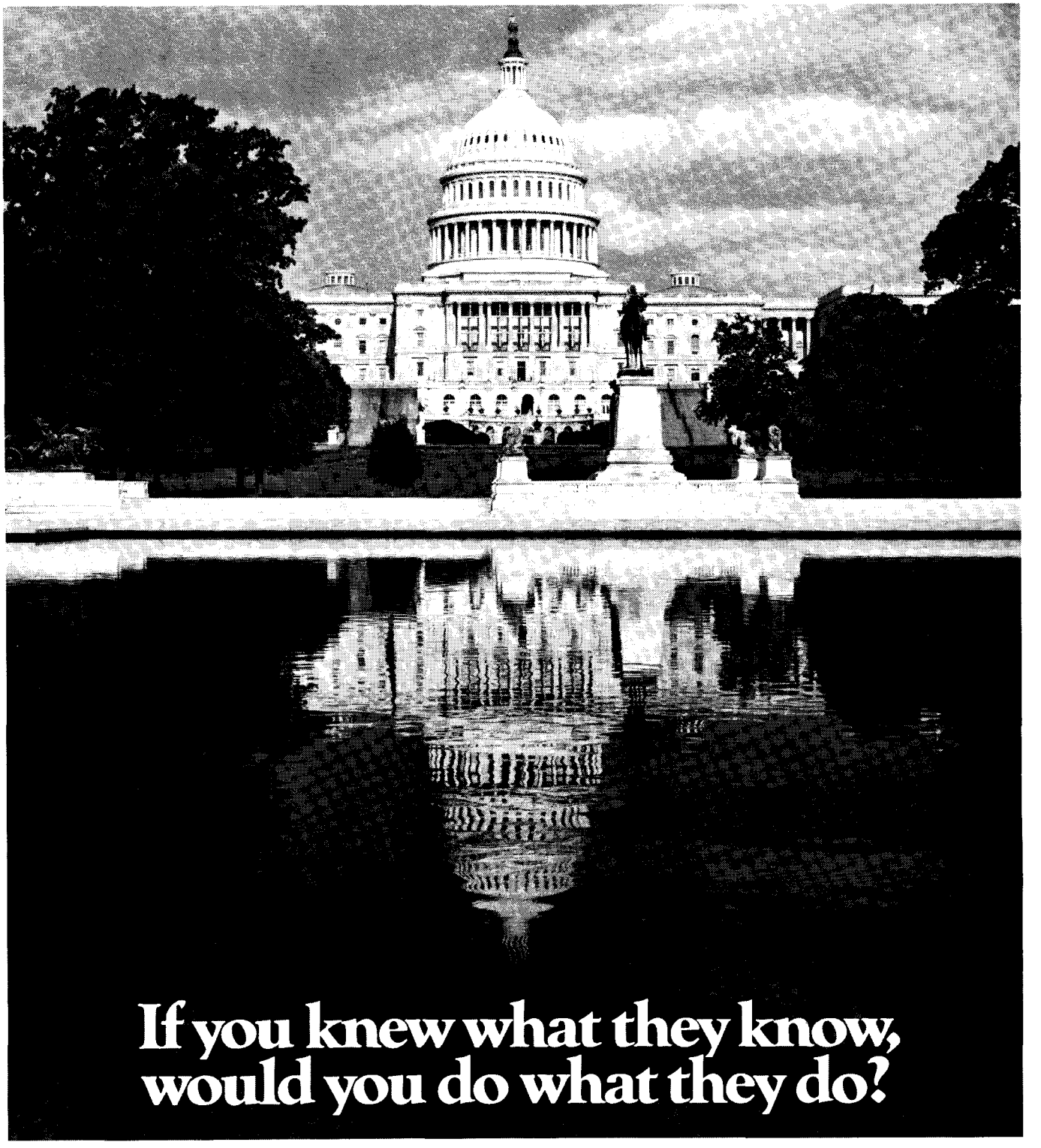

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Commentary
April 2003

The Folly of Containment

Robert J. Lieber

NO MATTER what finally happens in our confrontation with Iraq, the use of force against Saddam Hussein is a subject that is bound to be debated for years to come. Any proposed resort to war carries great risks and entails unforeseeable consequences; this particular resort to war, having occasioned months of impassioned and often bitter discussion at home and abroad, and having run up against determined resistance on the part of some of America's democratic allies, invites repeated reassessment.

These lines are being written in early March. If we should fail to go into Iraq at all, or if, having gone in, we should fail to win quickly and cleanly, critics of American action will assuredly claim vindication for their position. And even if things go well, even if they go very well, many will inevitably assert that the same result or better could have been achieved without force of arms and at a far lower political and diplomatic cost.

Beyond the fever swamps of the far Left and the far Right, beyond the serried ranks of the earnest demonstrators for "peace," with their incantations of no-blood-for-oil, beyond the delusional rantings about an "axis of oil and Jews" and the claims that the crisis with Iraq was manufactured by Israel and a cabal of its American supporters, it has been possible from the beginning to discern a more measured cluster of arguments opposing military action. These arguments have been advanced by people who are neither reflexively anti-American nor blind to Saddam's tyranny, his programs to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and his calculated defiance of the United Nations. Instead, their opposition to the use of force has proceeded through an appeal to an alternative and, in their view, superior approach: containment.

In many ways, indeed, it is the future of that venerable cold-war doctrine that has been on the line in the debate over Iraq. Whatever the outcome of this particular engagement, the real question being decided is what containment means in the world we have entered since September 11, 2001.

THOSE ADHERING to the containment model have aired their views thoroughly on the PBS *Newshour* and on talk shows as well as on the op-ed pages of our major newspapers and in journals of opinion and analysis. Many of them occupy respected positions in universities, foundations, and think-tanks, and their ideas are well represented in Congress. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, Senators Carl Levin of Michigan and Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, and presidential candidate Howard Dean of Vermont—all Democrats—are among them; so,

ROBERT J. LIEBER *is professor of government and foreign service at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and the author of, among other books,* No Common Power: Understanding International Relations *(2001) and* The Oil Decade *(1986). His latest edited volume is* Eagle Rules? Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the 21st Century *(2002).*

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too, are a number of Republicans. Their ranks also include former military leaders with reservations about frontally challenging Iraq like Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Wesley Clark.

There are various schools of thought among these critics, and differences of nuance and terminology when it comes to what they think we ought to do. Some, for instance, have called for "coercive inspections" in Iraq (the term favored in a report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), others for something called "vigilant containment" (urged by a group of scholars of international relations led by John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard). In propounding their alternative to war, many have raised dire warnings about the terrible risks of battlefield conflict, including Saddam's likely use of his weapons of mass destruction; others have predicted chaos and internecine bloodshed in a post-Saddam Iraq, held out the threat of a total breakdown in the machinery of international diplomacy, and the like. One distinguished advocate of containment, Stanley Hoffmann of Harvard, has urged that we concentrate on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians "before we turn on Iraq"—and he is not alone.

Still, the bottom line on which the argument rests is that a policy of containment—"the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting . . . political points," to quote the words of George F. Kennan in the 1947 article that gave the doctrine its name—has all along been sufficient to deal with the situation in Iraq, and that the Bush administration, in its determination to go to war, has never given it a fair chance to show that it could work. In building their case, the critics appeal to history and to experience. They contend that we have in fact been able to contain Saddam in the past, that we are doing so in the present, and that we can continue to do so in the future.

LOOKING TO the past, for example, Mearsheimer and Walt write that Saddam has shown himself to be "neither mindlessly aggressive nor particularly reckless," citing as evidence the fact that over the last 30 years Iraq has started "only" two wars.* Moreover, Saddam's decision to attack Iran in 1980 was, they assert, taken for essentially defensive reasons, and even his August 1990 invasion of Kuwait amounted to "an attempt to deal with Iraq's continued vulnerability" in the aftermath of the war with Iran. To the objection that, in the case of Kuwait, Saddam was in fact not contained either by a UN Security Council resolution demanding his withdrawal from that country or by the massing of an American-led army on his doorstep, Mearsheimer and Walt have answered by invoking the Iraqi dictator's belief that the U.S. would back off from open conflict rather than risk the casualties that Iraqi forces were certain to inflict on it.

Other authors examining Iraq's record point to the decade after the Gulf war as offering additional evidence for the success of containment. Here the contention is that at least up until 1998, when the first UN inspection team, UNSCOM, was forced to withdraw from the country, the combination of inspections and economic sanctions had significantly reduced Saddam's missile capabilities, degraded his nuclear program, and left his armed forces seriously weakened.

As for Saddam's disposition in the run-up to the current confrontation, he has been, according to proponents of containment, in a box. What has kept him in that box is, first of all, his own rationality. In the words of Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland, Saddam's is "a ruthless regime, but it isn't suicidal." The same calculation has been applied to his possession of weapons of mass destruction: "Iraq remains constrained from using such weapons," writes the activist Todd Gitlin—"which is the point of containment."

This idea was elaborated upon by a group of 33 professors who signed an ad in the *New York Times* last September. Although, they conceded, "war is sometimes necessary to insure our national security or other vital interests," it was not called for against Iraq. Among their reasons: there was no proof that Iraq had been collaborating with al Qaeda; a war with Iraq would distract us from the fight against terrorism; and, most crucially, even if Saddam were to add a nuclear capability to his already formidable array of chemical and biological weapons, we could nevertheless successfully deter him from using it. Although the ad did not spell out how exactly we were to accomplish this, its main authors, who were once again Mearsheimer and Walt, have since written that "the United States can contain Iraq effectively—even if Saddam has nuclear weapons—just as it contained the Soviet Union during the cold war." In support of this proposition they note that Saddam has "never used weapons of mass destruction against an adversary who could retaliate in kind."

* See their co-authored article, "'Realists' Are Not Alone in Opposing War in Iraq," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 15, 2002, and their Working Paper for the Kennedy School of Government, "Can Saddam Be Contained? History Says Yes," November 12, 2002. In more recent writings by Mearsheimer and Walt, the word "only" has disappeared.

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And there is, according to the critics, still another inhibiting factor—namely, the new United Nations inspection regime, UNMOVIC, headed by Hans Blix. To the proponents of containment, what is needed is simply to strengthen that regime. In the words of Jessica Tuchman Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment, "The idea is to disarm Iraq, and that can be done by truly muscular inspections backed by a multinational military force." The recommended steps include putting inspectors in the field who are "the most qualified and experienced experts available," getting our U-2 spy planes flying again, toughening our enforcement of "no-fly" zones and creating "no-drive" zones, destroying weapons sites that are being "sanitized" by the Iraqis, and putting UN bases on the ground if inspectors find they need additional support. Pushing these ideas still further, two Carnegie authors have suggested that the Security Council "compel" Iraq to answer remaining questions about its nuclear program and that the world body "establish a permanent monitoring system to keep Saddam under house arrest for the rest of his life."

Is there anything to these arguments? Let us return to the past, and specifically to our twelve-year experience with UN sanctions and weapons inspections, which the critics hail as a success. In fact, it was anything but.

In 1991, following Iraq's ouster from Kuwait and the end of the Gulf war, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 687, issued under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and therefore considered binding. This required Iraq to relinquish all existing weapons of mass destruction, to abandon its programs for the further development of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons as well as of missiles with a range beyond 150 kilometers, and to cooperate with UN inspectors in identifying and eliminating these weapons. In addition, economic sanctions that had been imposed in the aftermath of Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait were to be kept in place until the disarmament was completed. Finally, the U.S., Britain, and—for a time—France imposed no-fly zones that ultimately covered northern Iraq above the 36th parallel and southern Iraq below the 33rd parallel.

It is hardly a secret that this system failed. Accounts by leaders of UNSCOM (Ralf Ekeus, Richard Butler, David Kay, and others) have painstakingly corroborated Iraq's record of systematic deception and noncompliance. Initially, it is true, the Iraqis did reveal large stocks of chemical warheads—many of them dangerously unstable—and these were duly destroyed. But henceforth and in virtually every other area it dragged its feet or actively subverted the efforts of the inspectors; as the latter consistently came up empty, Iraq's apologists on the Security Council, especially France and Russia, pushed for easing or lifting the sanctions, thus further hobbling the inspectors in their task.

Throughout this period, Iraqi defectors would occasionally bring out evidence of previously unknown and/or denied programs, especially Saddam's biological-weapons program and his vast nuclear-enrichment effort. Whenever this happened, the Iraqis would grudgingly acknowledge the programs, rewrite their submissions to UNSCOM, reassert that they were still in full compliance, and the charade would begin again.

In time, inevitably, both the inspections regime and the sanctions eroded. The inspection teams had been penetrated by Iraqi intelligence, and their movements were relentlessly monitored and spied upon. To encourage division within the Security Council, Iraq launched a massive propaganda campaign about the suffering inflicted by the sanctions on innocent Iraqi women and children, languishing from shortages of food and medicine.* Meanwhile, it enlarged the holes in the sanctions regime and gained access to additional revenues by unofficially exporting oil via Turkey, Syria, and the coastal waters of Iran. It dangled oil contracts in front of the French, Russians, and Chinese; employed numerous illicit means to purchase materials to continue developing weapons of mass destruction†; and persuaded a number of other countries (Russia and France among them) to violate the ban on airline travel to Baghdad.

The weaker the international pressures grew, the more Saddam obstructed the work of the teams. Ultimately, in 1998, it became impossible to carry on, and the UNSCOM inspectors were removed. The United States, supported by Britain, launched four days of retaliatory air strikes; they had little effect.

After tortuous negotiations between the UN and Baghdad, a replacement regime (UNMOVIC) was created, endowed with significantly weaker powers and headed by a new chief, Hans Blix. Blix was acceptable to the Iraqis as his predecessors, Ralf Ekeus and Richard Butler, had not been. And for

* In fact, the sanctions allowed the importation of ample supplies, especially after the 1996 adoption of an oil-for-food program. That Iraqi civilians were suffering was true enough, but the cause was Saddam's repressive policies and his diversion of resources to pay for his palaces, his military, and the loyalty of his Baath-party cronies.

† See "Shopping with Saddam Hussein" by Gary Milhollin and Kelly Motz, Commentary, July-August 2001.

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obvious reasons: in his term as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the 1980's and 90's, Blix had certified that Iraq was in full compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty; his denials that Baghdad was pursuing a nuclear-proliferation program under the nose of IAEA officials persisted until the moment in 1991 when an UNSCOM team discovered one of Saddam's huge nuclear sites.

But it was not until after September 11, 2001, and after it had become clear that the Bush administration was preparing to use force against Iraq, that inspectors were finally allowed to return. The enabling act was Resolution 1441, unanimously approved by the Security Council on November 8, 2002. This resolution, the *seventeenth* in the UN's long history of futile demands that Saddam comply with the obligation to disarm, was explicit in stating that Iraq had been in "material breach" of previous resolutions, that it was being offered a "final opportunity" to comply, that it had to deliver within 30 days a "full, and complete declaration of all aspects of its programs," that "false statements or omissions . . . [would] constitute a further material breach," and that in such an eventuality Iraq would face "serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations."

Sure enough, 30 days later, Iraq delivered a 12,000-page report that falsely claimed its WMD programs no longer existed. On January 27 of this year, Blix testified that "Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance, not even today, of the disarmament which was demanded of it"; under the rubric of "unaccounted for," he cited 6,500 chemical bombs, stocks of VX nerve agents and anthrax, 3,000 tons of precursor chemicals, 360 tons of bulk agents for chemical weapons, and thousands of munitions for delivering such agents. Then, on February 5, Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered a comprehensive and utterly damning account of Saddam's record of defiance and deception and of his relentless drive to acquire and develop weapons of mass destruction.

To all this, Saddam's response, so breathtakingly cynical that it ought to have evoked the UN's wrath and scorn—but of course did not—was to issue an edict prohibiting the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

IN SUM, the record is long, dreary, and unmistakable. As Secretary Powell reminded his colleagues, Resolution 1441 was about *disarmament*, not about inspections; and disarmament has not occurred. The supposition that strengthened or "coercive" inspections would succeed in inducing Saddam to disarm where "regular" inspections failed is pointless. In the United Nations itself, no consensus could be expected to form behind such a proposal, and if such intrusive inspections were actually attempted, Saddam would deflect them in the same manner as before, lifting his skirt to show a little leg (that is, pretending to comply) and thereby inveigling members of the Security Council as well as the inspectors themselves into downplaying or disregarding the requirements of their mandate and its threatened consequences. Nor is the sine qua non for coercive inspections—a long-term, massive military presence in the region exerting a credible threat of force—in the least conceivable.

There is no reason to believe that Saddam would ever give up the goods. How could he? The possession of weapons of mass destruction is the keystone of his power, allowing him to intimidate his own populace, menace and dominate his neighbors, and in his own mind—as soon as he can acquire nuclear weapons—deter the United States from interfering with his ambitions.

This brings us to the subject of a nuclearized Iraq. Often overlooked in discussions about how long it would take Iraq to produce its own weapons-grade enriched uranium or plutonium is the fact—established years ago by UNSCOM—that Saddam already has a workable design for a nuclear weapon. While Iraq might need a few more years (as little as three years according to German intelligence, somewhat longer according to the CIA and others) to produce on its own the fissile material to make a bomb, that timetable would drop to under a year, even to a matter of months, if the Iraqis succeeded in buying or stealing material from, for example, North Korea or the former Soviet Union. The amount of such material that is required for a single fission weapon is not great, no bigger than a grapefruit; controls over the decaying nuclear-weapons industry of the former USSR remain uneven; and the number of needy or underemployed scientists and technicians is large.

The sheer scale of the Iraqi nuclear program revealed by UNSCOM over a decade ago far exceeded Western intelligence estimates. Since then, confirmation of Saddam's implacable intentions has continued to come from defectors, including Khidhir Hamza, Saddam's bomb maker, from the abundant evidence that Iraqi agents have pursued the acquisition of specialized materials from abroad, from reports by foreign intelligence services (British, German, Israeli, and French, in addition to our

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own), and from the simple fact that Saddam has forgone as much as $180 billion in oil revenue rather than comply with his disarmament obligations.

But, critics say, the Soviet Union was successfully deterred; why not Saddam? The comparison is far from reassuring. Cold-war-style deterrence required careful, rational calculation on both sides, plus the permanent deployment in Europe of large-scale American forces. Saddam's calculations are rather different from the Soviet Union's, and much less predictable—and in any case we are hardly about to keep massive amounts of men and materiel in the Persian Gulf indefinitely. But what critics also forget is that during the cold war we had no choice. In the early days of that conflict, we ourselves were deterred by the exhaustion of World War II and fears of a Soviet conquest of Western Europe; once the Soviets' nuclear arsenal had become highly developed, any all-out effort to disarm the USSR would have entailed the prospect of mass death and destruction on both sides. With Iraq, there are other options, and—for the moment—still time to exercise them.

Where the arguments put forward by advocates of containment veer into outright denial is on the subject of who, exactly, Saddam Hussein is. Their analyses give little significant weight to how this heedless gambler has launched wars of aggression against two of his neighbors (Iran and Kuwait), fired missiles at Iran as well as at Israel and Saudi Arabia, employed chemical weapons against Iran and against his own Kurdish population, and oppressed, brutalized, and committed mass murder against his own countrymen. As a leader, Saddam has repeatedly ignored his picked inner circle of advisers when their counsel has conflicted with his fixed preconceptions, to the point of initiating military actions that have hugely damaged his own interests.

An early example was the 1974 series of attacks on the Kurdish population in northern Iraq; when these brought fierce retaliation from Iran, Saddam was forced to sign a humiliating agreement ceding control of portions of the Iraqi border along the Shatt-al-Arab and adjacent waterways—thus setting the stage for his catastrophic war with Iran beginning in September 1980. That conflict, in which Saddam relied primarily on the poor advice of former Iranian military officers and attacked without any real planning, lasted eight years. From early 1984 on, Iraq used chemical weapons in every major battle. Despite the fact that it was easier for Iran to hit Baghdad and Basra than it was for Iraqi missiles to reach Iran's major cities, Saddam did not hesitate to bomb Iranian centers of population. In the end, the war cost the lives of at least 200,000 Iraqis and 400,000 Iranians, nearly resulted in Iraq's defeat and ruin, and left the country traumatized and deeply in debt.

But no sooner did the dust settle than Saddam launched another campaign against the Kurds, leveling villages, using poison gas, and murdering some 180,000 people. Then, in August 1990, he invaded Kuwait, determined to seize its oil, its territory, and its financial reserves. This too was a debacle. In the ensuing war, Saddam's army was decimated, and he himself escaped being ousted from power only because of the ill-fated decision by the elder President Bush to halt the ground war after just 100 hours and because the victorious allied forces permitted the Iraqi military to use its surviving helicopters and armor to slaughter rebelling Kurds and Shiites.

In short, both Saddam's character and the record of his behavior are another reason why containment—i.e., some structured way, short of war, of reliably preventing him from dominating or attacking his neighbors—is not viable. In January 1991, on the eve of the Gulf war, Iraq's foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, was handed a letter by Secretary of State James Baker at a meeting in Geneva. The letter warned of devastating consequences should Iraq use chemical or biological weapons in any military hostilities. The fact that the Gulf war passed without the employment of such weapons is often cited by critics as evidence that Saddam can be deterred. But it is no less significant that the same letter included two other warnings—against Iraqi support for terrorist acts, and against the destruction of Kuwait's oil fields and installations—that he simply ignored.

A senior (and pro-Iraqi) Russian diplomat, Yevgeny Primakov, once described what it was like to try persuading the Iraqi leader to withdraw from Kuwait: "I realized that it was possible Saddam did not have complete information. He gave priority to positive reports . . . and as for bad news, the bearer could pay a high price." Arab diplomats have noted the same propensity. In one especially grisly episode, in full view of bodyguards and others, Saddam shot his own health minister for questioning one of his actions. Amatzia Baram, perhaps the world's leading expert on modern Iraq, has chronicled many more such bizarre and frightening incidents, and the political psychologist Jerrold Post has likewise meticulously documented Saddam's extreme tendencies

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to grandiosity, sadistic cruelty, suspiciousness to the point of paranoia, and utter lack of remorse.

Shrewd but reckless—and, as Baram wryly notes, an "incurable optimist" who believes he will prevail no matter what the odds. Such is the man who has openly proclaimed his ambition to dominate his region, threatened to "burn half of Israel," and declared his readiness to take on the United States. This is not exactly the model of the risk-calculating, value-maximizing, rational actor posited by theorists of containment or inhabiting the imagination of critics of administration policy.

MISREADING HISTORY and misunderstanding the character and conduct of Saddam Hussein, the critics have also turned a blind eye to larger realities.

In a single morning in September 2001, simultaneous attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon propelled the United States and its allies into a new and lethal strategic environment. Not only are we no longer fighting the cold war, we are no longer in the realm of contingent scenarios, that catch-all term of the post-cold-war decade that loosely incorporated any number of potential dangers (including global warming, epidemics, overpopulation, drought, mass migration, and ethnic conflict) without any clear consensus as to whether or when any of them might erupt. Instead, the threats we face are at once unique and ominously conjoined: terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and the complicity of failed or rogue states.

September 11 demonstrated that terrorists and the states that harbor and support them are perfectly willing to countenance acts of wholesale murder without the slightest hesitation or moral scruple. Had the men who planned the attacks possessed the means, there are no grounds for thinking they would have refrained from using weapons of mass destruction in pursuit of their goals; to the contrary, they showed that a fully fueled jetliner can itself become such a weapon.

These new and real dangers have transformed the calculus of preemption and deterrence. The old understanding of the right of individual and collective self-defense, codified in Article 51 of the UN Charter, derives from the world of Pearl Harbor. Even the widely accepted (if still controversial) concept of anticipatory self-defense—as in Israel's June 1967 preemptive attack on Egypt and Syria—stems from a different and bygone era. In an environment where a terrorist attack with chemical or biological weapons, or with a concealed nuclear weapon, has become all too thinkable, there is a clear and legitimate right to take decisive action without waiting to be absolutely certain that such an attack is about to be unleashed. This, indeed, is the argument that underlies the National Security Strategy released by the Bush administration last September, setting out a coherent design for American policy in the face of today's catastrophic threats.

Vis-à-vis Iraq, the implication is plain: Saddam Hussein and his regime must be disarmed and deposed before they are in a position definitively to dominate the Gulf region and the wider Middle East or otherwise threaten the vital interests of the United States, whether directly or in complicity with terrorists.

This is why critics who question the "links" between Saddam and terrorism have missed the point. At issue is not just the matter of direct links—though these are easy enough to establish. Terrorists, including al Qaeda, require some kind of base. They do not dwell on abandoned offshore oil rigs or in outer space, but operate from the territory of national states. The full extent of the links between Saddam and al Qaeda remains in dispute, but the administration has provided convincing evidence that a top al Qaeda leader, Abu Musab Zarqawi, and other operatives have taken shelter in Iraq and received training there in the use of chemical weapons. In addition, Iraq's embassy in Islamabad (Pakistan) has coordinated contacts between Iraqi biochemists and members of al Qaeda, and other Iraqi embassies abroad have been in periodic contact with Islamist terrorists.

Nor, despite repeated claims to the contrary, do differences of ideology impede such cooperation. Bin Laden himself has described Iraq's Baath-party leaders as "infidels" while simultaneously insisting that "the interests of Muslims and socialists crisscross in the fighting against Crusaders."

Al Qaeda aside, there is a long history of connections between Iraq and terrorist groups. Baghdad provided a haven for the notorious Abu Nidal, who, perhaps knowing too much, was found last year to have committed "suicide." The Iraqis have also maintained a terrorist training base at Salman Pak, near Baghdad, where a Boeing 707 aircraft offers a realistic setting in which to prepare hijackers for their missions. And let us not forget the Iraqi attempt to assassinate President George H.W. Bush on his trip to Kuwait in April 1993, an action that, had it been successful, would have brought devastating consequences on Saddam's own head—further evidence, if any were still needed, of the reckless and violent inclinations of the Iraqi despot.

It is routinely claimed by advocates of contain-

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ment that the use of force against Iraq puts in jeopardy, and distracts us from, the campaign against al Qaeda. The opposite is more likely to be the case. The downfall of Saddam will not only put an end to Iraq's military, financial, and political support of al Qaeda and other terrorist groups; it will send a graphic warning to the remaining states that support terrorism. On this point, it is again worth quoting no less an authority than Osama bin Laden: "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse."

In the world we have inherited since September 11, 2001, the long-term prospects for reliably containing terrorists and rogue regimes are poor. Although the use of force should never be undertaken lightly, the weight of the evidence suggests that it is far better to confront a Saddam Hussein before rather than after he acquires nuclear weapons. Failing to act in time entails costs that can be measured not only regionally but globally: in this case, such costs would include a still more aggressive and emboldened Iraq, the likelihood of more rather than less worldwide terrorism, the certainty of a later and wider war when Baghdad's actions become impossible to appease or ignore, and the further withering-away of the United Nations into impotence and irrelevance.

On the other side of the ledger, the use of force brings not only risks but opportunities. Dislodging the Iraqi regime will deal a serious blow to Arab and Muslim rejectionists who have opposed any realistic proposal for peace and coexistence with Israel. Beyond that, as Fouad Ajami has eloquently written, the successful application of American power and prestige can stimulate change in the Arab world by strengthening those who seek to turn away at long last from the "belligerence and self-pity in Arab life, its retreat from modernist culture, and its embrace of conspiracy theories."

In the end, the search for alternatives to the use of force bespeaks a failure of imagination—a stark unwillingness, even after September 11, to conceive of what it means for weapons of mass destruction to fall into the hands of monstrous figures like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. In the light of this unfolding and ever more perilous reality, to choose to avoid force at all costs is to choose not the lesser but the greater evil. As one self-described reluctant hawk, Bill Keller of the *New York Times*, has put it, "In the short run, war is perilous. In the long run, peace can be a killer too." This is a fitting epitaph for the lost, and not soon to be recovered, world that gave rise to the doctrine of containment.

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Making Iraq Safe for Democracy

Efraim Karsh

In 1991, fears about the disintegration of Iraq were a prime impulse behind the decision to bring the first Gulf war to an end before Saddam Hussein was deposed. The reasoning was apparently that a defeated and weakened Saddam would be easier to contain than an unknown successor, particularly a regime run by pro-Iranian Shiites; that only a firm hand could safely steer Iraq's volatile political system; and that Saddam, for all his undeniable faults, was the most qualified person to offer such a hand.

In recent months, the same logic has cropped up in arguments opposing U.S. intervention in Iraq. As the point was summarized in a late-February news story in the *New York Times*, "If [Saddam] does leave, the outcome may be messy, unpredictable, and very violent as old scores, suppressed by the governing Baath party for more than three decades, are settled." This messy outcome, moreover, has been said to pose an immovable obstacle to the dreams of a democratic Iraq with which the Bush administration has beguiled itself and the American people. "Could a democratic leader," the same *Times* report went on, "emerge in this deeply divided nation, which many Iraqis themselves believe requires a strong, even autocratic, leader to stay united?"

Efraim Karsh, *head of Mediterranean studies at King's College, University of London, is currently a visiting scholar at Harvard. His book (with Inari Rautsi),* Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography, *has recently been reissued in a revised and updated edition by Grove Atlantic.*

There is something to be said for this line of questioning. To it may be added the protracted legacy of political violence that has plagued Iraq since its inception as a state in 1921 and that, long before Saddam Hussein perfected his own spectacularly vicious system of enforcement, was the evidently accepted method of maintaining political order in that country. Thus, in the summer of 1933, when the tiny Assyrian community in northern Iraq demanded ethnic and religious recognition, it was subjected to large-scale massacres by the Iraqi army that were lauded by the masses as an act of national heroism. And when, in July 1958, the Hashemite dynasty was overthrown by a military coup, the mutilated body of the Iraqi regent Abdel Ilah was dragged by a raging mob through the streets of Baghdad before being hanged at the gate of the ministry of defense. Four years later, the bullet-ridden corpse of the leader of that coup, General Abdel Karim Qassem, was displayed on Iraqi television to the entire nation. Qassem's successor was the Baath, Saddam's own party; when it was overthrown in November 1963 after a mere nine months at the helm, all sorts of loathsome instruments of torture were found in the cellars of the royal palace it had turned into an interrogation center, including (as one witness recounted) "electric wires with pincers, pointed iron stakes on which prisoners were made to sit, and a machine that still bore traces of chopped-off fingers."

Saddam has undoubtedly been the most capable

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as well as the most savage player in this system. During his years in power—both as vice-president and de-facto leader after the return of the Baath to power in the late 1960's and as president since July 1979—he fully subjected the ruling party to his will, purging the country's governing institutions and reducing the national decision-making apparatus to one man surrounded by a docile flock of close associates. Preempting any and all dissent—Saddam's rise to the presidency was accompanied by the elimination of hundreds of party officials and military officers, including friends—he subordinated all domestic and foreign policies to the one and only goal of political survival.

Yet, like many tyrants before him, Saddam also gradually maneuvered himself into a position that required raising the stakes incessantly in order to survive. Each new acquisition of power engendered a greater fear of losing it. After three decades of external aggression and domestic repression, he has quite evidently failed to eradicate all potential dangers. Nor would some other dictator fare any better. Unless there is fundamental change in Iraq, there will be no solution to the predicament confronting the man at the top of the political pyramid. Whether Sunni or Shiite, Baathist or Islamist, military or civilian, he will continue to confront dissent and disaster at every turn.

The status quo, in short, is no answer. But how realistic is the hope to transform Iraq into the first-ever Arab democracy? In an area of the world where the main instrument of political discourse is physical force, where the role of the absolute leader supersedes that of political institutions, and where citizenship is largely synonymous with submission, it can hardly be surprising that the Western ideal of liberal democracy should have been so glaringly lacking.

There are other complicating factors as well. Long after the fall of the Ottomans—the last great Muslim empire—the inextricable link among religion, politics, and society remains very much alive in the Muslim world, making the introduction of democratic ideals a daunting task. As we are constantly being told, there is no grassroots demand for democracy among Arabs and Muslims, and any attempt to impose it is bound to encounter stiff resistance and to arouse the proverbial "street" to new heights of anti-Americanism.

Nevertheless, and all these reservations notwithstanding, the September 11 atrocities have dramatically changed the West's overall calculus of cost and benefit, if only because they so starkly demonstrate the horrendous consequences of *failing* to address the Middle East's endemic malaise. Besides, it is not wholly inconceivable that, given the right guidance and support, Arab societies will indeed prove amenable to democracy; holding these societies to a lower political standard can be not only a recipe for inaction but a subtle form of racism. That is why the Bush administration's idea of "Iraq first," as a stepping-stone to a wider attempt to democratize significant parts of the Arab world, is of such far-reaching consequence and of such immense promise—provided, however, that the root causes for the lack of democracy in the Arab world are correctly identified and boldly addressed.

Any discussion of this subject must start with the fundamentally unjust distribution of power among the region's diverse ethnic and religious groups. Much has been written about the artificial nature of the state system in the modern Middle East. According to the received wisdom, the European powers (in particular France and Great Britain), having long set their sights on the territories of the declining Ottoman empire, exploited the latter's defeat in World War I to carve out a number of artificial states from its carcass. In so doing, however, they attended only to their own imperial interests, completely disregarding local yearnings for political unity.

This standard version is both true and radically incomplete. What it fails to take into account is the great influence wielded by Britain's local war allies, and particularly Hussein ibn Ali of the Hashemite family (the Sharif of Mecca) and his four sons—who as perpetrators of the "Great Arab Revolt" managed to manipulate the great powers into giving them vast territories of the defunct Ottoman empire without the slightest attention to the real wishes and aspirations of the inhabitants. The emirate of Transjordan (later to be known as the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan), for example, was established in 1921 to satisfy the imperial ambitions of Hussein's second son Abdallah, while in the same year the modern state of Iraq was created on behalf of and very much at the initiative of Abdallah's younger brother Faisal.

That the great powers were criminally complicit in this outcome is indisputable. Britain was quite aware of the diversity and fragmentation of the Arabic-speaking communities of the Ottoman empire in general and of Mesopotamia in particular (as the region that was to become Iraq had long been called). As early as 1919, Arnold Talbot Wilson, the acting high commissioner in Mesopotamia, expressed deep misgivings about the coun-

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try's fitness for immediate independence. Its predominantly tribal society, accounting for three-quarters of the population, lacked, he wrote, a "previous tradition of obedience to any government except that of Constantinople," and possessed "an almost instinctive hostility to Arab 'effendis' in positions of authority." Wilson also doubted whether the almost two million Shiites would be prepared to acquiesce in the domination of their Sunni brethren, less than a third their number, and whether "the warlike Kurds in Mesopotamia, who number nearly half a million," would ever accept an Arab ruler. In sum, "far from making the Arabs on this side our friends," Wilson warned, "recognition of Faisal as king of Mesopotamia can only be regarded in this country as a betrayal of its interests, and we shall alienate the best elements here."

Yet by the spring of 1921 the British government had been sufficiently seduced by Faisal's London champions, notably T. E. Lawrence, to disregard these realities: to impose the foreign Sunni ruler Faisal (who hailed from the Hijaz, in today's Saudi Arabia) on a predominantly Shiite population, and to incorporate a large non-Arab Kurdish minority into the newly-created state. In so doing, the British effectively saw to it that the socio-political conditions that had existed during Ottoman times, when Shiites were excluded from power and persecuted by the authorities, would be perpetuated indefinitely.

And so it proved. Over the ensuing decades, not only have the Shiites failed to play a role commensurate with their size in Iraq (where they constitute nearly two-thirds of the population), but they have also been ruled as an underprivileged class by the far smaller Sunni community (about a fifth of the population). Nor is this inequity in power the end of the story. In the 1970's, thanks to Saddam's ruthless development plans, the situation of the Shiites was made significantly worse as large numbers of them were compelled to migrate to the cities. In their miserable existence, they became fertile soil for anti-regime agitation, their resentment further fueled by their own religious authorities, the *ulama*, whose traditional position had been undermined by the Baath party's tight control over the state apparatus.

Religious animosities were thus piled on top of political ones. Organized Shiite opposition to Sunni rule had in fact begun to surface as early as the 1960's, in the form of an underground religious party, al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya, or the Islamic Call. Inspired by the teachings of the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the Da'wa preached the replacement of the modern secular state by an Islamic order. Saddam, fearing the spread of religious fundamentalism, had taken steps to deal with this threat upon coming to power, and by the mid-1970's a number of Shiite *ulama* had been secretly executed.

But that hardly put a stop to the problem. In February 1977, demonstrations led by Shiite clergymen broke out in the holy towns of Karbala and Najaf, security forces were sent to restore order, and by the time the confrontation subsided, thousands of Shiites had been arrested and an unspecified number on both sides killed or wounded. Within a month, a special court was set up to try participants in the riots. Eight *ulama* were sentenced to death and fifteen to life imprisonment. The following year, the regime struck at the lifeline of the *ulama* by taking control of all Shiite revenues.

Worse was to come in February 1979, following the overthrow of the shah of Iran and the rise to power in that country of a revolutionary Shiite regime headed by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Demonstrations in support of the new rulers of Iran in the Shiite areas of Iraq were met by military force, including tanks. Within months, martial law had been imposed and a repressive campaign was launched against the Da'wa and its leaders. In April 1980, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was executed together with his sister, and hundreds of Shiite political prisoners, most of them members of the Da'wa party, were placed before firing squads. Saddam sealed the southern part of Iraq, denying foreign worshippers access to Shiite shrines, and expelled some 100,000 Iraqi Shiites from the country.

IF THE Shiite experience in modern Iraq has been fearful, the country's other main ethnic group, the Kurds, have fared no better. A distinct group of Indo-European origin and of mainly Sunni faith, the Kurdish community, which comprises about 20 percent of Iraq's population, resides in the northern part of the country. In the wake of World War I, the Kurds were promised autonomy with an option for complete independence, only to discover three years later that they had been cheated: the Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and the victorious Allies bore no specific reference to the Kurds, promising only tolerance for minorities in general.

Since then, the Kurds have been one of the largest aggrieved national minorities in the Middle East. The intractability of their situation stems from a geopolitical fact: they are dispersed across

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four Middle Eastern countries—Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria—each of which has had a vested interest in suppressing their national aspirations. This predicament has been further aggravated by the fragmentation of the Kurdish community along linguistic, clan, and tribal lines, a circumstance that has hindered the formation of a collective identity and facilitated the group's suppression.

Kurdish separatism raises the specter of the dissolution of the Iraqi state into three entities: Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni. Had this happened early on, it might have rendered Iraq altogether nonviable, since approximately two-thirds of the country's oil production and reserves comes from the predominantly Kurdish areas, and the Kurds' fertile lands are Iraq's main granary.

But just as Baghdad has always been adamant about keeping Iraq whole, the Kurds, for their part, have conducted a sustained struggle against the central regime. At the beginning they asked for proportional representation in Iraq's official institutions, including the cabinet, the parliament, and the army, and for a share in the country's economic resources. Both demands were rejected, as was the claim for regional autonomy presented to the first Baath government in February 1963. Instead, the Baath launched a ferocious military campaign that dragged on inconclusively, driving yet another nail into the coffin of that short-lived regime.

By the time of the Baath's return to power in 1968, civil war seemed a distinct possibility. Kurdish guerrillas were attacking oil installations in Kirkuk, causing severe economic damage. In response, the central government rushed most of the Iraqi army (four out of six divisions) to the north. In the fierce fighting that followed, the military did not shy away from attacking civilians indiscriminately.

In March 1970, Saddam, then vice president, signed an agreement with the foremost Kurdish leader, Mustafa Barzani, that contained far-reaching concessions to the Kurds. The most important was recognition as a distinct national entity deserving of autonomous rule; other clauses guaranteed cultural, linguistic, and administrative rights, the appointment of a Kurd as vice president of Iraq, and the enhancement of Kurdish representation within the state's ruling institutions.

But no sooner had the ink dried than Saddam reneged on his promises. According to the agreement, a census was to be held within four years to delineate the exact areas where Kurds constituted a majority. Mixed areas, in which no ethnic group formed a clear majority, were to be kept out of the proposed Kurdish autonomous region. This issue was particularly critical in the Kirkuk province, where Iraq's main oil fields lay and where the Kurds laid claim to a majority. Saddam, who did not for a moment contemplate Kurdish control over the country's economic heartland, launched an ethnic-cleansing operation: in September 1971, some 40,000 Kurds were expelled to Iran on the grounds that they were not really Iraqis, and in 1972 tens of thousands more were forced out.

Harsh as these measures were, they paled in comparison with the treatment meted out to the Kurds during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88). In early 1988, as the end of the war seemed in the offing, Saddam embarked on a massive punitive campaign aimed at the complete eradication of the Iraqi Kurds as a distinct socio-political community. Named the Anfal campaign, the operation reached heights of brutality exceptional even by Saddam's merciless standards. Like a steamroller crushing everything in its way, the Iraqi army advanced through the Kurdish regions, indiscriminately spreading death and destruction. Villages were shelled or bombed before being stormed by the army. Then the villagers were rounded up, with the women and children separated from the men and sent to "hamlets" elsewhere. The men and boys were often summarily executed or dispatched to concentration camps in the southwestern Iraqi desert, never to be heard from again.

By the time this horrendous campaign came to an end in the autumn of 1988, thousands of villages and towns in Kurdistan had been demolished and their populations deported. Some half-million Kurds had been ethnically cleansed, while another 250,000 had fled to Turkey and Iran. The international community became vaguely concerned with this genocidal campaign only because of the extensive Iraqi use of chemical weapons, including mustard gas, cyanide, and tabun nerve agent. The most appalling incident took place in March 1988, when Iraqi forces employed gas on an unprecedented scale against the town of Halabja: 5,000 Kurds—men, women, children, and babies—were killed on that day, and nearly 10,000 suffered injuries.

THIS HISTORICAL record casts a black shadow on the idea of Saddam as protector of Iraq's territorial integrity. Not only has he failed to cement the disparate components of Iraqi society into a unified whole, but he has significantly exacerbated domestic factionalism. No less alarmingly, on several occasions he has brought his country to the brink of complete disintegration.

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One such occasion was the early 1970's, when the general uprising in the Kurdish regions, extensively supported by Iran, brought Iraq to the verge of an abyss. In March 1975, Saddam was forced to agree to radical territorial adjustments in Iran's favor in the Shatt al-Arab, Iraq's only naval outlet to the Persian Gulf. Then in 1980 came the futile eight-year war with Iran and, soon thereafter, the disastrously conceived Kuwaiti adventure in the summer of 1990. All in all, his catastrophic foreign adventures have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and wrought untold physical and economic wreckage. And this is not to speak of his domestic record, which includes tens of thousands of civilians brutally murdered by their government and millions left starving while their unelected ruler spends incalculable sums of money on palaces and monuments to himself. Upon Saddam's ascendancy to the presidency in 1979, Iraq was a regional economic superpower, boasting some $35 billion in foreign-exchange reserves. Today, it has been reduced to dire poverty and underdevelopment, with tens of billions in foreign debt.

Far from ensuring Iraq's survival as a nation-state, then, Saddam's continued rule poses the gravest threat to its very survival. By the same token, Saddam's removal from power could both liberate the Iraqi people from decades of brutal repression and safeguard the country's continued existence as a unified whole. Above all, it would create an opportunity, for the first time in nearly a century, to place the Iraqi state on a representative basis, one that truly reflected the "general will."

Over the past months, many people have devoted themselves to imagining what such a post-Saddam Iraq might look like. According to one detailed proposal, prepared last year by a group of Iraqi exiles headed by the prominent intellectual Kanan Makiya, a "transitional authority" chosen by Iraq's opposition groups would start operating inside the country as soon as the regime began to crumble. After the fall of Saddam, the plan calls for the complete dismantling of the Baath party and the establishment of a war-crimes tribunal and a truth commission to oversee an Iraqi equivalent of the de-Nazification of Germany after World War II. The report envisions a state based on thoroughly secular principles, emphasizing protections for the rights of minorities. Most importantly, it sketches a new system of government—a modified federalism whose constituent parts would be defined along geographical rather than ethnic lines.

There is little doubt that Iraq's best hope lies with the creation of some sort of decentralized federal system in which each of the country's ethnic and religious groups would be given a proportional share in national power and resources, as well as extensive cultural and political autonomy in its main place of residence. The clear results would be to elevate the majority Shiites to a position of political preeminence at the expense of the Sunnis, and to integrate the Kurds into the country's governing structures. The transformation would not be limited to cosmetic changes at the top (such as through the appointment of a Shiite president, a Sunni prime minister, a Kurdish foreign minister, and the like), but would be extended across the entire spectrum of civilian and military life.

THIS BRINGS us back to 1991. Was it not precisely because it feared a Shiite rise to dominance and Iraq's consequent vulnerability to the sway of Iranian militancy that Washington halted the Gulf war immediately after evicting Saddam's forces from Kuwait and then withheld support from the Shiite (and Kurdish) uprisings against him? Indeed it was. But American apprehensions were largely misplaced then, and all the more so now.

To start with, there is no fundamental hostility between Shiite Islam and the West, any more than there is an inherent affinity between the West and Sunni Islam. Prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, that Shiite country had served as America's foremost Middle Eastern ally and the protector of the (Sunni) monarchies in the Gulf, while successive radical Sunni regimes in Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus were a constant irritant to their Arab neighbors and the West.

No less important, the behavior of Iraqi Shiites during the Iran-Iraq war vividly demonstrates that they are hardly made of the same fabric as their Iranian co-religionists. In that conflict, not only did they fail to welcome their self-styled Iranian liberators, but they endured the hardships of war in much the same way as other Iraqis, and many of them fought shoulder to shoulder with their compatriots to rebuff the Iranian threat. While the number of Sunni officers in the Iraqi army remained disproportionately high, some Shiite officers were promoted to positions of prestige and responsibility in which they proved their loyalty and patriotism. As for Shiite desertions, these occurred at about the same rate as Sunni desertions and at substantially lower rates than desertions from largely Kurdish units. With the exception of isolated terrorist activities, the Shiite community sealed its social contract with the Iraqi state in the blood of its sons.

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As for the Kurds, it is true that a federal Iraq would fall short of satisfying their yearning for independence. But that yearning is impeded by the same geopolitical reality—namely, dispersion—that has prevented the materialization of Kurdish statehood till now. The most that the Kurds of Iraq can realistically aspire to is a consolidation and expansion of the autonomy they have enjoyed under American protection since the 1991 Gulf war, and to this most of their leaders have given their assent. If the Kurdish regions become integrated fully into the new Iraq, the Kurds will enjoy a peaceful and secure existence that is long overdue.

But none of this can happen overnight. If the creation of a federal system seems a necessary institutional condition for Iraq's eventual democratization, no less indispensable is a shift in the Iraqis' general political outlook. For Iraq's legacy of violence stems first and foremost from a failure to internalize either the principles or the guiding norms of the modern nation-state; as long as that failure persists, little true progress can be expected toward democracy.

Once again, the point can be elucidated by a little history. In brief, the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman empire did not undergo the processes of secularization that created modern Western nationalism in Europe in the late 1700's and that, over a century and a half later, enabled individual nation-states to step into the breach when the old European empires collapsed after World War I. By contrast, when the Ottoman empire fell, its Middle Eastern components still thought only in the old binary terms. There were, on the one hand, the intricate webs of local loyalties—to clan, tribe, village, town, religious sect, or ethnic minority. On the other hand, there was submission to the distant Ottoman sultan-caliph, in his capacity as the temporal and religious head of the world Muslim community. The latter category now stood empty.

Into this vacuum stepped ambitious leaders speaking the Western rhetoric of "Arab nationalism" but in fact aiming to create new empires. Arab rulers taught their peoples that national independence was a temporary aberration, soon to be rectified by the creation of a unified "Arab nation." This dream has been articulated most forcefully by the pan-Arab Baath regimes in Iraq and Syria, and it has led to mass suffering and dislocation.

In their report, Makiya and his fellow Iraqi exiles suggest that ethnic identity should be precluded as a basis for the new Iraqi state. As long as Iraq is defined as an *Arab* state, they argue, other ethnic groups, like Kurds and Assyrians, will continue to be second-class citizens.

This is a profound insight. Arab Iraqis must view themselves as Iraqis first, Arabs second; only thus can they avoid being torn by internal domestic schisms and implicated in imperial adventures. To generalize the same point beyond Iraq, one might say that only when the political elites of the Middle East reconcile themselves to the reality of state nationalism (*wataniya*) and forswear the imperial dream (*qawmiyya*) will the likes of Saddam Hussein be fully discredited. Similarly, only when the "pan-" factor has been banished from the Middle East's political vocabulary and replaced by a general acceptance of diversity will all the inhabitants of the region be enabled at last to look forward to a better future.

And what role are the United States and its allies to play in this drama? As the Middle East faces its most defining period since the end of World War I, one cannot help being struck by the similarities between the present situation and that moment. The world has of course changed fundamentally since then. The age of imperialism is long gone, and by no stretch of the imagination can today's U.S. be compared with the former European empires in terms of self-perception, world outlook, or foreign-policy goals. Yet, for whatever clues it can offer to the present, including which courses of action must be avoided, that moment is worth revisiting once more.

In May 1919, when the British government decided to amalgamate the Mesopotamian provinces of the defunct Ottoman empire into a newly created state, it, too, envisaged a federal system. This one comprised four geographical provinces: Basra, Baghdad, Euphrates, and Mosul. (Were Kurdistan to have been included in Iraq, it would have formed a fifth province.) Each was to be administered by a provincial council with "considerable powers but not at present to be made responsible for legislation." Instead, the local Arab governors at the head of each province were to be assisted by "a specially chosen British official of ability and character as municipal commissioner and adviser to the governor, in which dual capacity he could control finance and mitigate inevitable inefficiency in early stages."

In short, what was required was an orderly and prolonged transition to statehood under British tutelage and military protection. This comported well with the judgment of the acting civil commissioner, Arnold Talbot Wilson, who, as we saw

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above, was keenly aware of the unreadiness of the area for political independence. As Wilson wrote to his superiors in June 1920:

> The history of this country for the past few thousand years and the practical experience of the past three, alike convince me that we cannot give effect to mandate without risk of disaster, unless we are prepared to maintain for the next two years at least as many troops in the country as we may have, and in a state considerably more efficient than they are now.

In Talbot's opinion, indeed, unless the British government was prepared to proceed slowly with developing Mesopotamia into a self-governing democratic country—something that would demand an expenditure of men and money for years to come—it "would do better to face the alternative, formidable and, from [the] local point of view, terrible as it is, and evacuate Mesopotamia."

Alas, it was not to be. Eager to see Faisal installed as Iraq's first monarch, British decision-makers dropped their original federative idea in favor of a state that would be more tightly controlled and demographically far less representative. Nor did they heed Wilson's prescient warning about the need to go slowly. Seeking to have their cake and eat it too, they decided on substantial cuts in their military expenditures in Iraq while at the same time implementing plans for rapid modernization. This led in short order to a popular uprising along the southern Euphrates, unmatched in scope and intensity until the Shiite and Kurdish uprising against Saddam in the wake of the 1991 Gulf war.

NEARLY A century later, the choices confronting the Bush administration are starkly reminiscent of those faced by Britain after World War I. Should the U.S. throw its full weight behind the implementation of its ambitious ideals, or pull out shortly after the overthrow of Saddam and the destruction of his deadly arsenal, most probably resigning itself to the substitution of another Iraqi strongman for the deposed tyrant?

Given Iraq's violent experience during the past half-century, this latter option would almost certainly amount to a betrayal of the Iraqi people. Just as the creation of free and democratic societies in Germany and Japan after World War II necessitated, above and beyond the overthrow of the ruling parties, a comprehensive purge of the existing political elites and the reeducation of the entire populace, so Iraq must undergo a profound structural reform if it is to know representative government. This is certain to be a difficult process, one requiring an extensive American military presence (and, no doubt, occasional military operations) over a protracted period of time, as well as a sustained commitment of financial, administrative, and political aid. But if history tells us anything, it is that any other alternative is an assured recipe for disaster.

—March 7, 2003

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A Scientific Scandal

David Berlinski

In science, as in life, it is always an excellent idea to cut the cards after the deck has been shuffled. One may admire the dealer, but trust is another matter.

In a recent essay in Commentary, "Has Darwin Met His Match?" (December 2002), I discussed, evaluated, and criticized theories of intelligent design, which have presented the latest challenge to Darwin's theory of evolution. In the course of the discussion I observed that the evolution of the mammalian eye has always seemed difficult to imagine. It is an issue that Darwin himself raised, and although he settled the matter to his own satisfaction, biologists have long wished for a *direct* demonstration that something like a functional eye could be formed in reasonable periods of time by means of the Darwinian principles of random variation and natural selection.

Just such a demonstration, I noted in my essay, is what the biologists Dan-Erik Nilsson and Susanne Pelger seemed to provide in a 1994 paper.[1] Given nothing more than time and chance, a "light-sensitive patch," they affirmed, *can* "gradually turn into a focused-lens eye," and in the space of only a few hundred thousand years—a mere moment, as such things go.

David Berlinski *is the author of* A Tour of the Calculus, The Advent of the Algorithm, *and* Newton's Gift. *His new book,* Secrets of the Vaulted Sky, *is forthcoming from Harcourt later this year.*

Nilsson and Pelger's paper has, for understandable reasons, been widely circulated and widely praised, and in the literature of evolutionary biology it is now regularly cited as definitive. Not the least of its remarkable authority is derived from the belief that it contains, in the words of one of its defenders, a "computer simulation of the eye's evolution."

If this were true, it would provide an extremely important defense of Darwin's theory. Although a computer simulation is not by itself conclusive—a simulation is one thing, reality another—it is often an important link in an inferential chain. In the case of Darwin's theory, the matter is especially pressing since in the nature of things the theory cannot be confirmed over geological time by any experimental procedure, and it has proved very difficult to confirm under laboratory conditions. The claim that the eye's evolution has been successfully simulated by means of Darwinian principles, with results falling well within time scales required by the theory, is thus a matter of exceptional scientific importance.

And not just *scientific* importance, I might add; so dramatic a confirmation of Darwinian theory carries large implications for our understanding of the human species and its origins. This is no doubt

[1] "A Pessimistic Estimate of the Time Required for an Eye to Evolve," *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, London B (1994) 256, 53-58. In my essay I twice misspelled Susanne Pelger's name, for which I apologize.

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why the story of Nilsson and Pelger's computer simulation has spread throughout the world. Their study has been cited in essays, textbooks, and popular treatments of Darwinism like *River Out of Eden* by the famous Oxford evolutionist Richard Dawkins; accounts of it have made their way onto the Internet in several languages; it has been promoted to the status of a certainty and reported as fact in the press, where it is inevitably used to champion and vindicate Darwin's theory of evolution.

In my essay, I suggested that Nilsson and Pelger's arguments are trivial and their conclusions unsubstantiated. I also claimed that representations of their paper by the scientific community have involved a serious, indeed a flagrant, distortion of their work. But in a letter published in the March issue of COMMENTARY, the physicist Matt Young, whom I singled out for criticism (and whose words I have quoted here), repeated and defended his characterization of Nilsson and Pelger's work as a "computer simulation of the eye's evolution." It is therefore necessary to set the matter straight in some detail.

I hope this exercise will help to reveal, with a certain uncomfortable clarity, just how scientific orthodoxy works, and how it imposes its opinions on the faithful.

HERE IN their own words is the main argument of Nilsson and Pelger's paper:

> Theoretical considerations of eye design allow us to find routes along which the optical structure of the eye may have evolved. If selection constantly favors an increase in the amount of detectable spatial information, a light-sensitive patch will gradually turn into a focused-lens eye through continuous small improvements in design. An upper limit for the number of generations required for the complete transformation can be calculated with a minimum number of assumptions. Even with a consistently pessimistic approach, the time required becomes amazingly short: only a few hundred thousand years.

And here is how they arrived at their conclusions. The setting is "a single circular patch of light-sensitive cells"—a retina, in effect—"which is bracketed and surrounded by dark pigment." A "protective layer" lies above these light-sensitive cells, so that the pigment, the light-sensitive cells, and the protective layer form a kind of sandwich. Concerning the light-sensitive patch itself, Nilsson and Pelger provide no further details, indicating neither its size nor the number of cells it might contain.

What they do assume, if only implicitly, is that changes to the initial patch involve either a deformation of its shape or a thickening of its cells. The patch can be stretched, dimpled, and pulled or pushed around, and cells may move closer to one another, like bond salesmen converging on a customer.

So much for what changes. What is the change worth? Assuming (reasonably enough) that an eye is an organ used in order to see, Nilsson and Pelger represent its value to an organism by a single quantitative character or function, which they designate as "spatial resolution" or "visual acuity"—sharp sight, in short. Visual acuity confers an advantage on an organism, and so, in any generation, natural selection "constantly favors an increase in the amount of detectable spatial information."

There are two ways in which visual acuity may be increased in an initial light-sensitive patch: a) by the "invagination" of the patch, so that it becomes progressively more concave and eventually forms the enclosed interior of a sphere; and b) by the constriction of the sphere's aperture (the two rounded boundaries formed as the flat patch undergoes invagination). These changes may be represented on sheets of high-school graph paper on which two straight lines—the x and y axes of the system—have been crossed. On the first sheet, representing invagination, visual acuity moves upward on one axis as invagination moves to the right on the other; on the second sheet, visual acuity moves upward as constriction moves to the right. The curves that result, Nilsson and Pelger assert, are continuous and increasing. They do not hurdle over any gaps, and they go steadily upward until they reach a theoretical maximum.

The similar shape of the two graphs notwithstanding, invagination and aperture constriction exercise different effects on visual acuity. "Initially, deepening of the pit"—i.e., invagination—"is by far the most efficient strategy," Nilsson and Pelger write; "but when the pit depth equals the width, aperture constriction becomes more efficient than continued deepening of the pit." From this, they conclude that natural selection would act "first to favor depression and invagination of the light-sensitive patch, and then gradually change to favor constriction of the aperture."

THE RESULT is a pin-hole eye, which is surely an improvement on no eye at all. But there exists an aperture size beyond which visual acuity cannot be improved without the introduction of a lens. Having done all that it can do, the pin-hole eye lapses. Cells within the light-sensitive sphere now oblig-

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ingly begin to thicken themselves, bringing about a "local increase" in the eye's refractive index and so forming a lens. When the focal length of the lens is 2.55 times its radius—the so-called Mattiessen ratio—the eye will have achieved, Nilsson and Pelger write, the "ideal solution for a graded-index lens with a central refractive index of 1.52."[2]

Thereafter, the lens "changes its shape from ellipsoid to spherical and moves to the center of curvature of the retina." A flat iris "gradually forms by stretching of the original aperture," while the "focal length of the lens . . . gradually shortens, [until] it equals the distance to the retina . . . producing a sharply focused image." The appearance of this spherical, graded-index lens, when placed in the center of curvature of the retina, produces "virtually aberration-free imaging over the full 180 degrees of the visual field."

The same assumptions that governed invagination and aperture constriction hold sway here as well. Plotted against increasing lens formation, visual acuity moves smoothly and steadily upward as a graded-index lens makes its appearance, changes its shape, and moves to center stage. When these transformations have been completed, the result is a "focused camera-type eye with the geometry typical for aquatic animals."

One step remains. Nilsson and Pelger now amalgamate invagination, constriction, and lens formation into a single "transformation," which they represent by juxtaposing, against changes in visual acuity, changes to the original patch in increments of 1 percent. The resulting curve, specifying quantitatively how much visual acuity may be purchased for each 1-percent unit of change, is ascending, increasing, and straight, rising like an arrow at an angle of roughly 45 degrees from its point of origin. Transformations are "optimal" in the sense that they bring about as much visual acuity as theoretically possible, with the "geometry of each stage [setting] an upper limit to the spatial resolution of the eye."

It is the existence and shape of this fourth curve that justify their claim that "a light-sensitive patch will gradually turn into a focused-lens eye through continuous small improvements in *design*" (emphasis added). This is not the happiest formulation they could have chosen.

How much does the initial light-sensitive patch have to change in order to realize a focused camera-type eye? And how long will it take to do so? These are the questions now before us.

As I have mentioned, Nilsson and Pelger assume that their initial light-sensitive patch changes in 1-percent steps. They illustrate the procedure with the example of a flat one-foot ruler that also changes in 1-percent steps. After the first step, the ruler will be one foot plus 1 percent of one foot long; after the second step, it will be 1-percent longer than the length just achieved; and so forth. It requires roughly 70 steps to double a one-foot ruler in length. Putting the matter into symbols, $1.01^{70} \cong 2$.

Nilsson and Pelger undertake a very similar calculation with respect to their initial light-sensitive patch. But since the patch is a three-dimensional object, they are obliged to deal with three dimensions of change. Growing in steps of 1 percent, their blob increases its length, its curvature, and its volume. When all of these changes are shoehorned together, the patch will have increased in magnitude along some overall (but unspecified) dimension.

The chief claim of their paper now follows: to achieve the visual acuity that is characteristic of a "focused camera-type eye with the geometry typical for aquatic animals," it is necessary that an initial patch be made 80,129,540 times larger (or greater or grander) than it originally was. This number represents the *magnitude* of the blob's increase in size. How many *steps* does that figure represent? Since $80{,}129{,}540 = 1.01^{1{,}829}$, Nilsson and Pelger conclude that "altogether 1,829 steps of 1 percent are required" to bring about the requisite transformation.

These steps, it is important to remember, do not represent *temporal* intervals. We still need to assess how rapidly the advantages represented by such a transformation would spread in a population of organisms, and so answer the question of how long the process takes. In order to do this, Nilsson and Pelger turn to population genetics. The equation that follows involves the multiplication of four numbers:

$$R = h^2 \times i \times V \times m$$

Here, R is the response (i.e. visual acuity in each generation), h is the coefficient of heredity, i designates the intensity of selection, V is the coefficient of variation (the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean), and m, the mean value for visual acuity. These four numbers designate the extent to which heredity is responsible for visual acuity, the intensity with which selection acts to prize it, the way its mean or average value is spread over a pop-

[2] A graded-index lens is a lens that is not optically homogeneous; the figure of 1.52 is "the value close to the upper limit for biological material."

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ulation, and the mean or average value itself. Values are assigned as estimates to the first three numbers; the mean is left undetermined, rising through each generation.

As for the estimates themselves, Nilsson and Pelger assume that $h^2 = .50$; that $i = 0.01$; and that $V = 0.01$. On this basis, they conclude that $R = 0.00005m$. The response in each new generation of light-sensitive patches is 0.00005 times the mean value of visual acuity in the previous generation of light-sensitive patches.

Their overall estimate—the conclusion of their paper—now follows in two stages. Assume that n represents the number of generations required to transform a light-sensitive patch into a "focused camera-type eye with the geometry typical for aquatic animals." (In small aquatic animals, a generation is roughly a year.) If, as we have seen, the mean value of visual acuity of such an eye is $1.01^{1,829} = 80,129,540$, where 1,829 represents the number of steps required and 80,129,540 describes the extent of the change those steps bring about; and if $1.00005^n = 1.01^{1,829} = 80,129,540$, then it follows that $n = 363,992$.

It is this figure—363,992—that allows Nilsson and Pelger to conclude at last that "the time required [is] amazingly short: only a few hundred thousand years." And this also completes my exposition of Nilsson and Pelger's paper. Business before pleasure.

NILSSON AND Pelger's work is a critic's smorgasbord. Questions are free and there are second helpings.

Every scientific paper must begin somewhere. Nilsson and Pelger begin with their assumption that, with respect to the eye, morphological change comes about by invagination, aperture constriction, and lens formation. Specialists may wish to know where those light-sensitive cells came from and why there are no other biological structures coordinated with or contained within the interior of the initial patch—for example, blood vessels, nerves, or bones. But these issues may be sensibly deferred.

Not so the issues that remain. Nilsson and Pelger treat a biological organ as a physical system, one that is subject to the laws of theoretical optics. There is nothing amiss in that. But while theoretical optics justifies a *qualitative* relationship between visual acuity on the one hand and invagination, aperture constriction, and lens formation on the other, the relationships that Nilsson and Pelger specify are tightly *quantitative*. Numbers make an appearance in each of their graphs: the result, it is claimed, of certain elaborate calculations. But no details are given either in their paper or in its bibliography. The calculations to which they allude remain out of sight, if not out of mind.

The 1-percent steps: in what units are they expressed? And how much biological change is represented by each step? Nilsson and Pelger do not say. Nor do they coordinate morphological change, which they treat as simple, with biochemical change, which in the case of light sensitivity is known to be monstrously complex.

Does invagination represent a process in which the patch changes as a whole, like a balloon being dimpled, or is it the result of various local processes going off independently as light-sensitive cells jostle with one another and change their position? Are the original light-sensitive cells the complete package, or are new light-sensitive cells added to the ensemble as time proceeds? Do some cells lose their sensitivity and get out of the light-sensing business altogether? We do not know, because Nilsson and Pelger do not say.

Biologists commenting on Darwin's theory have almost always assumed that evolution reflects what the French biologist François Jacob called *bricolage*—a process of tinkering. Biological structures are put together out of pieces; they adapt their function to changes in their circumstances; they get by. This suggests that in the case of eye formation, morphological change might well purchases *less* visual acuity than Nilsson and Pelger assume, the eye being tinkered into existence instead of flogged up an adaptive peak. But if, say, only half as much visual acuity is purchased for each of Nilsson and Pelger's 1-percent steps, twice as many steps will be needed to achieve the effect they claim. What is their justification for the remarkably strong assertion that morphological transformations purchase an optimal amount of visual acuity at each step?

Again we do not know, because they do not say.

More questions—and we have not even finished the hors d'oeuvres. The plausibility of Nilsson and Pelger's paper rests on a single number: 1,829. But without knowing precisely how the number 1,829 has been derived, the reader has no way of determining whether it is reasonable or even meaningful.

If nothing else, the number 1,829 represents the maximum point of a curve juxtaposing visual acuity against morphological transformation. Now, a respect for the ordinary mathematical decencies would suggest that the curve is derived from the number, and the number from various calculations. But all such calculations are missing from Nilsson and Pelger's paper. And if the calculations are not

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given, neither are any data. Have Nilsson and Pelger, for example, *verified* their estimate, either by showing that 1,829 1-percent steps do suffice to transform a patch into an eye, or by showing that such an eye may, in 1,829 1-percent steps, be resolved backward into an initial light-sensitive patch? Once again, we do not know because they do not say.

Still other questions suggest themselves. Although natural selection is mentioned by Nilsson and Pelger, it is a force that plays no role in their reasoning. Beyond saying that it "constantly favors an increase in the amount of detectable spatial information," they say nothing at all. This is an ignominious omission in a paper defending Darwinian principles. An improvement in visual acuity is no doubt a fine thing for an organism; but no form of biological change is without cost.

Let us agree that in the development of an eye, an initial light-sensitive patch in a given organism becomes invaginated over time. Such a change requires a corresponding structural change to the organism's anatomy. If nothing else, the development of an eye requires the formation of an eye socket—hardly a minor matter in biological terms. Is it really the case that an organism otherwise adapted to its environment would discover that the costs involved in the reconstruction of its skull are nicely balanced by what would initially be a very modest improvement in sensitivity to light? I can imagine the argument going either way, but surely an argument is needed.

Then there is Nilsson and Pelger's data-free way with statistics. What is the basis of the mathematical values chosen for the numbers they use in assessing how rapidly transformation spreads in a population of eye patches? The coefficient of variation is the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean. The standard deviation, one might ask, of *what*? No population figures are given; there are no quantitative estimates of any relevant numerical parameter. Why is selection pressure held constant over the course of 300,000 years or so, when plainly the advantages to an organism of increasing light sensitivity will change at every step up the adaptive slope? Why do they call their estimates pessimistic (that is, conservative) rather than wildly optimistic?

Finally, Nilsson and Pelger offer an estimate of the number of *steps*, computed in 1-percent (actually, 1.00005-percent) intervals, that are required to transform their initial patch. At one point, they convert the steps into generations. But a step is not a temporal unit, and, for all anyone knows, each step could well require half again or twice the number of generations they suggest. Why do Nilsson and Pelger match steps to generations in the way they do? I have no idea, and they do not say.

We are at last at the main course. Curiously enough, it is the intellectual demands imposed by Darwin's theory of evolution that serve to empty Nilsson and Pelger's claims of their remaining plausibility.

Nilsson and Pelger assert that only 363,992 generations are required to generate an eye from an initial light-sensitive patch. As I have already observed, the number 363,992 is derived from the number 80,129,540, which is derived from the number 1,829—which in turn is derived from nothing at all. Never mind. Let us accept 1,829 *pour le sport*. If Nilsson and Pelger intend their model to be a vindication of Darwin's theory, then changes from one step to another must be governed by random changes in the model's geometry, followed by some mechanism standing in for natural selection. These are, after all, the crucial features of *any* Darwinian theory. But in their paper there is no mention *whatsoever* of randomly occurring changes, and natural selection plays only a ceremonial role in their deliberations.

At the beginning of their paper, Nilsson and Pelger write of their initial light-sensitive patch that "we *expose* this structure to selection pressure favoring spatial resolution" (emphasis added), and later that "[a]s the lens approaches focused conditions, *selection pressure* gradually appears to . . . adjust its size to agree with Mattiesen's ratio" (emphasis added). But whatever Nilsson and Pelger may have been doing to their patch, they have not been exposing it to "selection pressure." The patch does only what they have told it to do. By the same token, selection pressures play no role in adjusting the size of their lenses to agree with Mattiesen's ratio. That agreement is guaranteed, since it is Nilsson and Pelger who bring it about, drawing the curve and establishing the relevant results. What Nilsson and Pelger *assume* is that natural selection would track their results; but this assumption is never defended in their paper, nor does it play the slightest role in their theory.

And for an obvious reason: if there are no random variations occurring in their initial light-sensitive patch, then natural selection has nothing to do. And there are no random variations in that patch, their model succeeding as a defense of Darwin's theory only by first emptying the theory of its content.

An example may make clearer both the point

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and its importance. Only two steps are required to change the English word "at" to the English word "do": "at" to "ao" and "ao" to "do." The changes are obvious: they have been *designed* to achieve the specified effect. But such design is forbidden in Darwinian theory. So let us say instead, as Darwin must, that letters are chosen randomly, for instance by being fished from an urn. In that case, it will take, on average, *676* changes (26 letters times 26) to bring about the same two steps.

Similarly, depending on assessments of probability, the number of changes required to bring about a single step in Nilsson and Pelger's theory may range widely. It may, in fact, be anything at all. How long would it take to transform a light-sensitive patch into a fully functioning eye? It all depends. It all depends on how *likely* each morphological change happens to be. If cells in their initial light-sensitive patch must discover their appointed role by chance, all estimates of the time required to bring about just the transformations their theory demands—invagination, aperture construction, and lens formation—will increase by orders of magnitude.

If Darwin were restored to pride of place in Nilsson and Pelger's work, the brief moment involved in their story would stretch on and on and on.

FINALLY, THERE is the matter of Nilsson and Pelger's computer simulation, in many ways the gravamen of my complaints and the dessert of this discussion.

A computer simulation of an evolutionary process is not a mysterious matter. A theory is given, most often in ordinary mathematical language. The theory's elements are then mapped to elements that a computer can recognize, and its dynamical laws, or laws of change, are replicated at a distance by a program. When the computer has run the program, it has simulated the theory.

Although easy to grasp as a concept, a computer simulation must meet certain nontrivial requirements. The computer is a harsh taskmaster, and programming demands a degree of specificity not ordinarily required of a mathematical theory. The great virtue of a computer simulation is that if the set of objects is large, and the probability distribution and fitness function complicated, the computer is capable of illustrating the implications of the theory in a way that would be impossible using ordinary methods of calculation. "Hand calculations may be sufficient for very simple models," as Robert E. Keen and James Spain write in their standard text, *Computer Simulation in Biology* (1992), "but computer simulation is almost essential for understanding multi-component models and their complex interrelationships."

Whatever the merits of computer simulation, however, they are beside the point in assessing Nilsson and Pelger's work. In its six pages, their paper contains no mention of the words "computer" or "simulation." There are no footnotes indicating that a computer simulation of their work exists, and their bibliography makes no reference to any work containing such a simulation.

Curious about this point, I wrote to Dan-Erik Nilsson in the late summer of 2001. "Dear David," he wrote back courteously and at once,

> You are right that my article with Pelger is not based on computer simulation of eye evolution. I do not know of anyone else who [has] successfully tried to make such a simulation either. But we are currently working on it. To make it behave like real evolution is not a simple task. At present our model does produce eyes gradually on the screen, but it does not look pretty, and the genetic algorithms need a fair amount of work before the model will be useful. But we are working on it, and it looks both promising and exciting.

These are explicit words, and they are the words of the paper's senior author. I urge readers to keep them in mind as we return to the luckless physicist Matt Young. In my COMMENTARY essay of last December, I quoted these remarks by Mr. Young:

> Creationists used to argue that . . . there was not enough time for an eye to develop. A computer simulation by Dan-Erik Nilsson and Susanne Pelger gave the lie to that claim.

These, too, are forthright words, but as I have just shown, they are false: Nilsson and Pelger's paper contains no computer simulation, and no computer simulation has been forthcoming from them in all the years since its initial publication. Sheer carelessness, perhaps? But now, in responding to my COMMENTARY article, Matt Young has redoubled his misreading and proportionately augmented his indignation. The full text of his remarks appears in last month's COMMENTARY; here are the relevant passages:

> In describing the paper by Nilsson and Pelger . . . , I wrote that they had performed a computer simulation of the development of the eye. I did not write, as Mr. Berlinski suggests, that they used nothing more than random variation and natural selection, and I know of no reference that says they did.

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> . . .The paper by Nilsson and Pelger is a sophisticated simulation that even includes quantum noise; it is not, contrary to Mr. Berlinski's assertion, a back-of-the-envelope calculation. It begins with a flat, light-sensitive patch, which they allow to become concave in increments of 1 percent, calculating the visual acuity along the way. When some other mechanism will improve acuity faster, they allow, at various stages, the formation of a graded-index lens and an iris, and then optimize the focus. Unless Nilsson and Pelger performed the calculations in closed form or by hand, theirs was, as I wrote, a "computer simulation." Computer-*aided* simulation might have been a slightly better description, but not enough to justify Mr. Berlinski's sarcasm at my expense. . . .

And here is my familiar refrain: there is *no* simulation, "sophisticated" or otherwise, in Nilsson and Pelger's paper, and their work rests on no such simulation; on this point, Nilsson and I are in complete agreement. Moreover, Nilsson and Pelger do *not* calculate the visual acuity of any structure, and certainly not over the full 1,829 steps of their sequence. They suggest that various calculations have been made, but they do not show how they were made or tell us where they might be found. At the very best, they have made such calculations for a handful of data points, and then joined those points by a continuous curve.

There are two equations in Nilsson and Pelger's paper, and neither requires a computer for its solution; and *there are no others*. Using procedures very much like Nilsson and Pelger's own, Mr. Young has nevertheless deduced the existence of a missing computer simulation on theoretical grounds: "Unless Nilsson and Pelger performed the calculations in closed form or by hand, theirs was, as I wrote, a computer simulation." But another possibility at once suggests itself: that Nilsson and Pelger did not require a computer simulation to undertake their calculations because they made no such calculations, their figure of 1,829 steps representing an overall guess based on the known optical characteristics of existing aquatic eyes.

Whatever the truth—and I do not know it—Mr. Young's inference is pointless. One judges a paper by what it contains and one trusts an author by what he says. No doubt Matt Young is correct to observe that "computer-*aided* simulation might have been a better description" of Nilsson and Pelger's work. I suppose one could say that had Dan-Erik Nilsson and Susanne Pelger rested their heads on a computer console while trying to guess at the number of steps involved in transforming a light-sensitive patch into a fully functioning eyeball, their work could also be represented as computer-aided.

Matt Young is hardly alone in his lavish misreadings. The mathematician Ian Stewart, who should certainly know better, has made virtually the same patently false claims in *Nature's Numbers* (1995). So have many other prominent figures.[3] But misreadings are one thing, misrepresentations another. More than anyone else, it has been Richard Dawkins who has been responsible for actively misrepresenting Nilsson and Pelger's work, and for disseminating worldwide the notion that it offers a triumphant vindication of Darwinian principles.

In a chapter of his 1995 book, *River Out of Eden*, Dawkins writes warmly and at length about Nilsson and Pelger's research.[4] Here is what he says (emphasis added throughout):

> [Their] task was to set up *computer models* of evolving eyes to answer two questions . . . [:] is there a smooth gradient of change, from flat skin to full camera eye, such that every intermediate is an improvement? . . . [and] how long would the necessary quantity of evolutionary change take?
>
> In their *computer models*, Nilsson and Pelger made no attempt to simulate the internal workings of cells.
>
> . . . Nilsson and Pelger began with a flat retina atop a flat pigment layer and surmounted by a flat, protective transparent layer. The transparent layer was allowed *to undergo localized random mutations of its refractive index*. They then let *the model transform itself at random*, constrained only by the requirement that any change must be small and must be an improvement on what went before.
>
> The results were swift and decisive. A trajectory of steadily mounting acuity led unhesitatingly from the flat beginning through a shallow indentation to a steadily deepening cup, *as the shape of the model eye deformed itself on the computer screen*. . . . And then, *almost like a conjuring trick*, a portion of this transparent filling

[3] Among those who, by contrast, have raised (on the Internet) points similar to my own, I would single out especially Brian Harper, a professor of mechanical engineering at Ohio State University.

[4] A version of the same material by Dawkins, "Where D'you Get Those Peepers," was published in the *New Statesman* (July 16, 1995).

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> condensed into a local, spherical region of higher refractive index.
>
> . . . This ratio is called Mattiessen's ratio. Nilsson and Pelger's *computer-simulation model homed in* unerringly on Mattiessen's ratio.

How very remarkable all this is—inasmuch as there are no computer models mentioned, cited, or contained in Nilsson and Pelger's paper; inasmuch as Dan-Erik Nilsson denies having based his work on any computer simulations; inasmuch as Nilsson and Pelger never state that their task was to "set up computer models of evolving eyes" for any reason whatsoever; inasmuch as Nilsson and Pelger assume but do not prove the existence of "a smooth gradient of change, from flat skin to full camera eye, such that every intermediate is an improvement"; and inasmuch as the original light-sensitive patch in Nilsson and Pelger's paper was never allowed to undergo "localized random mutations of its refractive index."

And how very remarkable again—inasmuch as there are no computer "screens" mentioned or cited by Nilsson and Pelger, no indication that their illustrations were computer-generated, and no evidence that they ever provided anyone with a real-time simulation of their paper where one could observe, "almost like a conjuring trick," the "swift and decisive" results of a process that they also happen to have designed.

And yet again how very remarkable—inasmuch as Nilsson and Pelger's "computer-simulation model" did not home in unerringly on Mattiessen's ratio, Nilsson and Pelger having done all the homing themselves and thus sparing their model the trouble.

Each and every one of these very remarkable asseverations can be explained as the result of carelessness only if one first indicts their author for gross incompetence.

FINAL QUESTIONS. Why, in the nine years since their work appeared, have Nilsson and Pelger never dissociated themselves from claims about their work that they know are unfounded? This may not exactly be dishonest, but it hardly elicits admiration. More seriously, what of the various masters of indignation, those who are usually so quick to denounce critics of Darwin's theory as carrying out the devil's work? Eugenie Scott, Barbara Forrest, Lawrence Krauss, Robert T. Pennock, Philip Kitcher, Kelly Smith, Daniel Dennett, Paul Gross, Ken Miller, Steven Pinker—they are all warm from combat. Why have they never found reason to bring up the matter of the mammalian eye and the computer simulation that does not exist?

And what should we call such a state of affairs? I suggest that scientific fraud will do as well as any other term.

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"Boiling a Kid": Reflections on a New Bible Commentary

Hillel Halkin

"IT IS a tree of life to those who lay hold of it," the book of Proverbs says—not of the Torah but of the vaguer concept of "Wisdom." Most Jews who know this verse are more familiar with it from the synagogue, where it is recited—sung, in many congregations—as part of the prayer that accompanies the return of the Torah scroll to its ark after the weekly reading from the Pentateuch.

Etz Hayim, "Tree of Life," is therefore an apt name for the new commentary on the Pentateuch, or Five Books of Moses, that was published over a year ago by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and its Rabbinical Assembly.* Prepared by a committee of eminent Conservative rabbis and scholars, it appears in a handsome oversize volume together with the biblical text in Hebrew and English—the latter in the 1985 translation of the Jewish Publication Society (JPS).

Etz Hayim is a more important book than the term "biblical commentary" might indicate. That is not only because, in addition to its gloss on the biblical text, it contains an appendix of 160 double-column pages of essays, by over 40 contributors, on the Torah and contemporary ways of reading it. It is also because biblical commentaries are a time-honored way of presenting a cohesive view of Judaism. Apart from Philo of Alexandria in the 1st century C.E., whose influence on later Jewish thought was nil, systematic philosophies of Judaism are a relatively late development in Jewish life, beginning only in the Middle Ages. But unsystematic ones can be found, starting with the 4th century C.E., in the verse-by-verse exegeses of the Torah that the rabbis compiled in numerous midrashic books, as well as in similar biblical commentaries in such classics of Jewish thought as the great 13th-century kabbalistic work, the Zohar. *Etz Hayim* takes its place in this tradition. Although nowhere in it is there stated a comprehensive credo for Conservative Jews, its many pages ultimately add up to one.

The publication of *Etz Hayim* is thus a noteworthy event, especially because the American Conservative movement, the largest of American Jewry's three major religious denominations, has often been accused of having no clear theological positions of its own and of defining itself more as a tertium quid between what it is not—i.e., Orthodoxy or Reform—than by what it is. (Historically, indeed, this was precisely how the Conservative movement began in America with the founding of its institutional flagship, the Jewish Theological Seminary, in 1886.) The old quip that an Ortho-

HILLEL HALKIN *is the author most recently of* Beyond the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel *(Houghton-Mifflin). Among his many contributions to* COMMENTARY *are "Can the Bible Be Trusted?" (July-August 1999) and "Genesis and the Talking Heads" (February 1997). His review of Norman Podhoretz's* The Prophets *appeared in our November 2002 issue.*

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dox Jew walks to synagogue on the Sabbath, a Reform Jew drives to it, and a Conservative Jew parks at a safe distance reflects the widely held perception that, whereas Orthodoxy and Reform stand for clear principles, Conservatism stands for fuzzy compromises—a perception that may only have been strengthened by the 1988 "Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism" known as *Emet ve-Emunah*, "Truth and Faith." Nor, though the movement has had its major theologians, does their thought represent a coherent stance. One could hardly imagine more different approaches to Judaism than the sociological rationalism of Mordecai M. Kaplan and the subjectivist existentialism of Abraham Joshua Heschel, the movement's two most notable 20th-century thinkers.

Conservative praxis has been no less confusing. Whereas Orthodoxy and Reform have been consistent in their attitude toward rabbinic law, the former affirming and the latter denying its authority for the modern Jew, Conservatism appears to have waffled. Does, for instance, a sincere commitment to Judaism require one to observe the traditional Sabbath or dietary laws? Yes, says Orthodoxy. No, says Reform. Conservatism—at least in the eyes of its critics—says Maybe.

And *Etz Hayim*? The biblical dietary laws are one of the subjects of the portion of Leviticus called Shemini, the Torah reading for the week in which this issue of COMMENTARY may be arriving in the mailboxes of many of its subscribers. So let us look at *Etz Hayim*'s treatment of these laws in Leviticus 11.

"THESE ARE the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals: any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud," begins Leviticus 11 in the JPS translation. Then it lists several prohibited mammals, like the camel and pig, that meet only one of these requirements; proceeds to aquatic creatures ("anything in water . . . that has fins and scales, these you may eat"); and ends with birds and "winged swarming things."

Etz Hayim's remarks on the 47 verses of this passage are divided—as is the new commentary in general—into three sections. The first, printed directly beneath the biblical text and called the "P'shat," the rabbinic term for "literal meaning," seeks to elucidate that meaning in the light of modern biblical scholarship. The second, appearing below the P'shat and called the "D'rash," a word used by the rabbis to refer to a text's implied or logically or imaginatively deducible content, gives a Conservative view of the significance of Leviticus 11 for the modern reader. A third section, named "Halakhah L'Ma'aseh," or "Practical Halakhah" (Jewish religious law), comes at the bottom of the page and comments on the ways in which the biblical dietary commandments were later amplified in rabbinic law.

For example: looking at the P'shat on the two verses beginning, "These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals," we are told by *Etz Hayim* that the Hebrew word for "creature" (*hayah*) is a "general term" while that for "land animal" (*behemah*) is more specific, and that "To qualify as pure, an animal's hoofs must be split all the way through, producing two toes, of a sort, so that the animal in question does not walk on paws." Jumping to the bottom of the page, we read in the Halakhah L'Ma'aseh section, under "*any animal*":

> For meat to be *kasher* ("kosher," fit for consumption under Jewish law), it must not only come from the animals designated in this chapter (e.g., cows, sheep, goats, buffalo, and deer), but must also be slaughtered, soaked, salted, and prepared according to Jewish law.

But the most interesting part of the commentary on these two verses is the D'rash. It begins as follows:

> An attentive reading of this chapter clearly shows that the dietary laws are not based on considerations of health. . . . The dietary laws constitute a way of sanctifying the act of eating. The eating of meat requires killing a living creature, constantly seen by the Torah as a compromise. These laws elevate the eating of meat to a level of sanctity by introducing categories of permitted and forbidden. For animals, eating is a matter of instinct; only human beings can choose on moral or religious grounds not to eat something otherwise available.

It then continues:

> The dietary laws are given incrementally in the Torah: forbidding boiling a kid in its mother's milk; then prohibiting the ingestion of blood; then declaring certain species of mammal, fish, and fowl unfit for consumption. Similarly, many Jews who begin from a position of limited observance can commit themselves to sanctifying their mealtimes in an incremental manner. They may begin by avoiding pork and shellfish, continue by separating meat and

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> dairy products, and so on. No one need feel like a hypocrite for not keeping all of the commandments immediately. What is important is to be on the path of observance, to be, in the words of *Emet ve-Emunah* . . . a "striving" Jew.

The inner dialectic of this D'rash is subtle. It begins in the unstated context of an ancient rabbinical debate, already lively in talmudic times and sharpened in the Middle Ages, over whether some or all of the ritual commandments of the Bible have a utilitarian explanation (the great 12th-century philosopher Maimonides, for example, thought the dietary laws had in part a hygienic intent), or whether they are best viewed as arbitrary decrees whose sole purpose is obedience to the divine will. *Etz Hayim* opts for the latter view. The Bible, it says, declares certain animals edible not because they are healthier than others, or indeed because they are healthy at all, but because eating should be a religious act embodying principles of discrimination.

The next move in the D'rash—again without calling attention to the rabbinic background—is to mobilize a tradition, found in medieval commentators like Rashi and Nahmanides, that Adam and Eve were vegetarians in the garden of Eden and that meat-eating was a consequence of the expulsion from paradise. The D'rash does this by stating that the dietary laws, despite sanctioning certain animals as food, actually represent a "compromise" between a biblical ideal of abstention from meat and man's baser nature. Concisely and elegantly, *Etz Hayim* thus weaves several strands of rabbinic thought into the suggestion that the biblical attitude toward meat-eating is, apart from its concession to human frailty, not very different from the currently fashionable criticism of the raising of animals for slaughter and consumption.

Even bolder, however, is the remainder of the D'rash—for here, still using rabbinic interpretive method, *Etz Hayim* breaks with basic rabbinic norms. Taking as its point of departure the "incremental" presentation of the dietary laws in the Torah—the ban on boiling a kid in its mother's milk, from which the rabbis derived the inadmissibility of mixing meat and dairy, is first stated in Exodus 23, while that on eating blood does not appear until Leviticus 3*—*Etz Hayim* allegorizes this into a prescription for their incremental *observance*. A Jew resolving to keep the rules of kashrut, it suggests, might start by dropping the bacon with his eggs, then cut out cheeseburgers, and finally give up non-kosher meat entirely. Meanwhile, he need not "feel like a hypocrite," since what matters is that he is trying.

It must be said that there is nothing in rabbinic tradition to justify such an approach. To be sure, when it comes to what the rabbis call *mitzvot aseh*—mandated acts whose omission, though regrettable, is not deeply sinful—incrementalism may be acceptable. If a Jew, who is enjoined to pray three times a day, manages to pray only once, this is indeed better than not praying at all. But *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*—acts expressly prohibited—are something else. From the point of view of halakhah, a pickpocket who decreases the number of wallets he steals from three to one daily has not become less of a thief, nor does abstaining from some prohibited foods while knowingly eating others make one a greater observer of the dietary laws. On the contrary: whereas the thief may be able to plead extenuating circumstances, such as the need to make a living, the no-bacon-but-cheeseburger Jew has no excuses. Judged by traditional Jewish standards, a "hypocrite," not to say a sinner, is exactly what he is.

Etz Hayim on Leviticus 11 is thus contemporary in its bow to vegetarianism (elsewhere, it is even more outspokenly au courant in its feminism); classically Conservative in its central message (Jewish ritual observance is good for you, but everyone must decide on his own dosage); compassionate in its wording (who would not rather be a "striving" than a sinful Jew?); and profoundly enigmatic in the questions it poses. Is giving up bacon before cheeseburgers called for because the prohibition on pig meat is biblical while that on mixing meat and dairy is merely rabbinic? If so, is swearing off bacon obligatory for the "striving" Jew, or can he be a striver while eating it, too? And why should biblical law matter more than rabbinic law, anyway? Because the Torah is a divinely revealed document while rabbinic law reflects human endeavor? But what does "divinely revealed" mean to Conservative Jews? And if rabbinic law is not also—as it is for Orthodoxy—a manifestation of God's will, why obey it at all? Why not take the classical Reform position that modern Jews are free to disregard it?

These are not trivial questions. They are the very questions to which critics of the Conservative movement, both on its religious "Left" and on its religious "Right," have repeatedly accused it of fudging the answers. Let us see how *Etz Hayim* deals with them.

* Although a prohibition on eating blood is already issued by God to Noah in Genesis 9:4, it does not appear there as part of Mosaic law.

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"NOW MOUNT SINAI," say verses 18-19 of Chapter 19 of the JPS version of the book of Exodus, "was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder."

There follow what are known as the Ten Commandments. Immediately after them begin the extensive legal regulations of the Pentateuch. But what does the Torah mean when it says that God spoke on Mount Sinai, and how are we to understand what happened there? A thinking Jew's opinion about this matter must surely determine how he relates to the entire question of Jewish observance—which is perhaps why there has never been a clear Conservative position on it. *Etz Hayim* attempts to give us one.

The first thing to observe here is that *Etz Hayim* does not question that something *did* happen at Sinai. Since the second half of the 19th century, many Bible scholars have grouped the Sinai story with other supposed "legendary" episodes in Scripture, such as the tales of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis; by contrast, the *Etz Hayim* commentary sides with more traditionalist scholars in assuming that these narratives have a historical basis. The only actual discussion of the issue occurs in the book's separate section of essays, in a cautious presentation of "Biblical Archeology." There, writing about the Bible's account of Israel's bondage in and exodus from Egypt, of which the Sinai story is part, Lee Levine observes that while "[t]here is no reference in Egyptian sources to Israel's sojourn in that country, and the evidence that does exist is negligible and indirect," nevertheless "these few indirect pieces of evidence . . . do suggest a contextual background for the Egyptian servitude (of at least some of the people who later became Israelites) and the appearance of a new population in Canaan." Which is to say that, if one wishes to believe that there indeed was an exodus and a dramatic convocation at Mount Sinai, there is no scholarly hindrance to doing so.

Etz Hayim, at any rate, does wish us to believe it—up to a point. The location of this point is already partly fixed by the JPS translation on which it relies. This, though not an official Conservative document, was largely the work of rabbis and scholars associated with the Conservative movement. One minor peculiarity is its version of Exodus 19:19: "As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder." The Hebrew preposition-plus-noun translated as "in thunder," *b'kol*, is inherently ambiguous, because elsewhere in the Bible the word *kol* can mean "voice," "sound," or indeed—but only in its plural form—"thunder." "Thunder" is almost certainly what the plural form of *kolot* does mean several verses previously, in 19:16, where we read, "On the third day, as morning dawned [on Mount Sinai] there was thunder [*kolot*] and lightning." Yet nearly all traditional Jewish translations and commentaries, from the third-century B.C.E. Greek Septuagint to the previous JPS translation of 1917, have taken *kol* in 19:19 to denote—however this is conceived of—God's *voice*.*

This is a consequential point. Here is what *Etz Hayim*'s P'shat on Exodus 19:16-19 has to say about God's thunder on Mount Sinai, along with the fire and smoke:

> Violent atmospheric disturbances are said to precede and accompany the theophany. The Bible frequently portrays upheavals of nature in association with the self-manifestation of God. . . . The vivid, majestic, and terrifying depiction that draws its inspiration from natural phenomena, such as the storm, volcano, and earthquake, is meant to convey the awe-inspiring effect of the event on those who experienced it.

In other words, *Etz Hayim* is telling us, not only was there, literally speaking, no voice of God at Sinai, there was not necessarily any thunder, either; such "vivid, majestic, and terrifying" depictions can be considered metaphors employed by the author of Exodus "to convey the awe-inspiring effect of the event." What, then, happened there? All we are left with, it would seem, is an "event" of which no more can be said than that it took place.

Of course, this may be an unavoidable way of looking at that event, even from the point of view of a "traditionalist" scholar. If, on the one hand, something that occurred over 3,000 years ago at a mountain in Western Asia deeply affected the lives not only of those who experienced it but of all the generations of their descendants, it must have been very powerful; on the other hand, given all that we know about the human memory and imagination and their ability to reshape the past within even brief spans of time, what can possibly be affirmed about the substance of this "something" other than that it is unknown and unknowable? Rationally, such agnosticism is unexceptionable—and yet, as an explanation of why this makes the Torah a di-

* This is also the wording of the King James Bible. To the best of my knowledge, the only previous English Bible translation to assume that *kol* can mean "thunder" in the singular and to render it as such in this verse is the 1952 Revised Standard Version of the National Council of Churches.

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vinely revealed book to whose laws Jews owe their allegiance, it is, to say the least, problematic.

The editors of *Etz Hayim* appear to have been well aware of this. That is why, one presumes, they have included in the essay section three different treatments of "Revelation." All three are thoughtful and harmonize with one another.

Thus, for example, on the subject of "Revelation: Biblical and Rabbinic Perspectives," Daniel Gordis observes:

> The Torah does not specify precisely what was revealed to Moses. . . . It is striking that the Torah seems more concerned that the people Israel accept the notion that revelation took place than that they reach any certainty about the content of that revelation.

This is seconded by Elliot Dorff in an essay on "Medieval and Modern Theories of Revelation." "The Torah itself," Dorff writes,

> is ambiguous as to how much of God's revelation the people heard. Some rabbinic interpretations (e.g., Exodus Rabba 5:9) go so far as to point out that at Sinai each person understood God's revelation in his or her own way, depending on each individual's intelligence and sensitivity.

And Dorff continues, after discussing the "God-encounter" theology of the two German-Jewish thinkers Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig:

> The revelation at Sinai is critically important because that is where our ancestors as a people first encountered God and wrote their reaction to that event in the document that became the constitutive covenant between God and the Jewish people. . . . Each time we read the Torah anew, nothing less than God's revelation is taking place again.

With which Jacob Milgrom, finally, discussing "The Nature of Revelation and Mosaic Origins," concurs by writing that "revelation was not a one-time Sinaitic event."

But if revelation is taking place all the time—if it occurs whenever we "encounter God"—this hardly elevates our experience to the level of what the Bible says happened at Sinai but rather reduces our sense of what happened at Sinai to the level of our own experience. At most, then, the difference between Sinai and those moments in our lives when we feel a communion with something sacred or transcendent is a matter of degree. Although the biblical event may have been more intense, or shared by more people, it was subjective, just like our own. Why, then, should a Jew accept its authority?

It can be argued, perhaps, that what is simultaneously experienced subjectively by a large number of people becomes an objective fact, so that Sinai is unique as a revelatory moment because its "God-encounter" was participated in by all Israel. This is the meaning Elliot Dorff seeks to extract from the midrash in Exodus Rabba to which he alludes and which—in commenting on the presence of both the plural and singular forms of *kol* in the biblical account—is indeed startlingly bold:

> Rabbi Yohanan says: A voice [*kol*] went forth and was divided into 70 voices [*kolot*] for the 70 languages of the world. . . . Rabbi Tanhuma said: . . . Come see how one voice went forth to each person in Israel and each understood it according to his capacity—the elderly men according to theirs, and the young men according to theirs, and the children according to theirs, and the infants according to theirs, and the women according to theirs. And even Moses [understood it] according to his, for it is written, "As Moses spoke, God answered him in a voice [*b'kol*]"—in a voice that he was capable of receiving.

And yet, as Rabbi Tanhuma might say, come see the difference. Exodus Rabba tells us that even the thunder heard at Sinai was the 70 or the 600,000 voices of God speaking at once (600,000 being the number of Israelites said to have been at the foot of the mountain). The JPS translation, with the backing of the *Etz Hayim* commentary, tells us that even God's one voice was nothing but thunder—if that!

Let us accept the sincerity, if not the logic, of Elliot Dorff's contention that it makes no real difference "whether God spoke words at Sinai, or whether God inspired human beings to write down specific words, or whether human beings wrote down the words of the Torah in response to their encounter with God in an attempt to express the nature and implications of that encounter." In all these cases, he argues, "the authority of the Torah's revelation is, in part, divine." Let us not even pause here to ask whether the words "in part" might render the whole proposition meaningless. Let us assume that they do not, and that the "parts" of the Torah whose authority is divine include Leviticus 11. Bacon, then, is out. But why cheeseburgers?

The biblical "proof" offered by the rabbis for the ban on mixing meat and dairy is discussed in the

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talmudic tractate of Hulin. It is based on the fact that the commandment, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk," occurs, identically worded, in three different places in the Pentateuch—twice in Exodus and once in Deuteronomy. Since it is an axiom of rabbinic thought that the Torah is a single, seamless document given to Moses in which there is not an unnecessary or redundant word, the question must be asked: why is the prohibition repeated three times?

The answer given in the Talmud is that its first occurrence refers to cooking the kid with milk, the second to eating it with milk, and the third to deriving any benefit from such a dish, such as by selling it to a non-Jew. And how do we know that these three-bans-in-one apply not just to goats but also to other domestic ruminants such as cows and sheep? Because, Rabbi Akiva says of the same triply repeated prohibition, of what it excludes. The first time it appears, we may understand it to be excluding from its jurisdiction non-domestic ruminants like deer; the second time, poultry (which according to some ancient rabbis was edible with milk); and the third time, non-kosher animals like pigs (which cannot be eaten by Jews even without milk, of course, but which can be cooked by Jews with milk and sold—as in a restaurant—to non-Jews). By a process of elimination, then, domestic ruminants fall under the ban.

Such argumentation, needless to say, strikes the modern mind as far-fetched—and indeed the rabbis themselves, cognizant that many of their halakhic interpretations seemed to stray far from the apparent intention of the biblical text, felt called upon to justify their procedures. They did so by declaring that the vast compendium of the "Oral Torah"—their term for rabbinic law—was given at Sinai together with a far more concise "Written Torah" in which it reposes immanently, as it were, and from whose maximally terse because perfect language it must be teased out by logical method. Numerous midrashim exist to illustrate this belief, one of the best-known being a story about Moses and Rabbi Akiva that is cited by Jacob Milgrom in his essay on revelation.

In this story, Moses is magically transported in time to a lesson in Akiva's classroom, in which he sits without understanding a word of what is being said. (Could the subject, possibly, have been meat and milk?) Crestfallen at both his mental insufficiency and the apparent neglect of his teachings, he brightens when Akiva, asked "Master, where did you learn this?" by a student, replies, "It is a law given to Moses at Sinai." The story, Milgrom observes, "portrays the human role throughout the generations in the revelatory process. . . . It behooves and indeed compels each generation to be active partners of God in determining and implementing the divine will."

This midrash is both profound and charming, though its ending, omitted by Milgrom, takes a somewhat darker view of the human "partnership" in "implementing the divine will." (The story concludes with Moses being vouchsafed a vision of Akiva's martyrdom by the Romans. "Master of the Universe," he asks, "is this the reward for studying Torah?" To which God answers inscrutably: "Be silent, for so I have decreed!") But while, as parable, the story makes perfect sense in the traditional rabbinic context, in the context of *Etz Hayim* it makes none. This is because *Etz Hayim*, in its acceptance of modern biblical scholarship, explicitly does not view the Torah as a seamless document.

Here is how the volume's senior editor, David L. Lieber, puts it in his introduction:

> Conservative Judaism is based on rabbinic Judaism. It differs, however, in the recognition that all texts were composed in given historical contexts. The Conservative movement, in short, applies historical, critical methods to the study of the biblical text. It views the Torah as the product of generations of inspired prophets, priests, and teachers, beginning with the time of Moses but not reaching its present form until the postexilic age, in the 6th or 5th century B.C.E.

But one conclusion of "historical, critical method" is that the book of Deuteronomy was written by a different hand from the one that wrote the book of Exodus. If that is the case, then the Torah's triple repetition of "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" cannot be considered to represent a deliberate authorial strategy, much less be used as a basis for a complex process of logical deduction. How, then, can the ban on mixing dairy and meat be thought of as "a law given to Moses at Sinai?"

SO CHEESEBURGERS are all right, after all? No, they are not. We have already seen that *Etz Hayim* counsels the reader to aim at eliminating them from his diet. It simply never explains coherently *why*, not even after we have considered the several reasons advanced by Edward Greenstein in his essay on "Dietary Laws." There, Greenstein writes that the ban on mixing dairy and meat is a way of expressing a "reverence for life," since it tells us that "milk, which is meant to sustain life,

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may not be turned into a means of preparing an animal for eating." In addition, while "the system [of kashrut] may appear artificial and arbitrary . . . the Torah has the community [of Israel] make distinctions, just as God did in creating the world. . . . Following in God's footsteps, so to speak, conveys holiness." And finally: "A people maintains its ethnic identity by eating differently. . . . [T]he heroes of Jewish narrative display their loyalty to their religious tradition and to their people by observing the dietary laws."

None of these defenses of kashrut invokes the authority of either the Torah or the rabbis. All, rather, are based on the supposition that the dietary laws are good for the individual Jew and the Jewish people on spiritual, moral, and national grounds. This sounds very similar to the utilitarian arguments on behalf of Jewish observance put forth by a thinker like Mordecai Kaplan in such works as *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934) and *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (1958). Hardly a religious believer in any ordinary sense of the word, Kaplan, who was deeply influenced by the pragmatic perspective of the Hebrew writer and social philosopher Ahad Ha'am, viewed religious practice not as an end in itself but as a means of preserving and inculcating the values of Judaism in a modern, scientific world.

Indeed, if Kaplan and A.J. Heschel, the latter influenced by Buber and Rosenzweig, represent the two poles of "Left" and "Right" between which the thought of the Conservative movement has swung, these poles mark the boundaries of *Etz Hayim*, too. On the one hand, there is the ineffable (a favorite word of Heschel's) moment at Sinai, where something of enormous significance took place that cannot be described in itself but only in terms of its consequences. And on the other hand there are the consequences, which cannot be justified in terms of Sinai but only in themselves. In between is a gap that, even if 1,560 intelligent pages attempt to bridge it, refuses to disappear.

Etz Hayim gives us many reasons why a modern Jew should not eat cheeseburgers, but many reasons are needed only when a single, compelling one does not exist. Nor, in the final analysis, will all the admirable thought and effort that have gone into *Etz Hayim* convince many Conservative Jews either to walk to synagogue on the Sabbath or to stop feeling vaguely guilty for driving. If the new Bible commentary proves anything, it is that Conservatism is a movement of inconsistency and compromise not just at the practical but at the highest intellectual level. It remains precisely what it has always been and has resented being called: neither Orthodoxy nor Reform.

Yet this also remains the source of its strength. For it is as such a vaguely defined middle ground that the 40 percent or so of all synagogue-affiliated American Jews who belong to Conservative congregations would appear to view themselves. Compromise is often messy and rarely satisfying, but it is the stuff of life. How strenuously can one object to its being the stuff of the Tree of Life?

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At Home in Jerusalem

Ruth R. Wisse

One of the main thrills of visiting Israel these days is the opportunity to experience the country for oneself. The Jewish state may be the most scrutinized place on the globe, but lately it has also been among the most misrepresented. Anyone seeing the country through the lens of the TV networks, even a network as favorably disposed to it as Fox News Channel, would expect to find a war-torn, corpse-strewn landscape, the survivors of the general carnage frantically scurrying about to escape the next round of predators. (Other networks carrying images of the same carnage tend to hold Israel responsible for it.) If, only recently, Americans stocking up on bottled water and duct tape could be portrayed in the thrall of an unreasoning panic, one can just imagine the hysteria that must be gripping Israel, chief target of all the maniacs in the Middle East.

But the city of Tel Aviv rising up from the Mediterranean looked exceptionally bright in the sunshine as my plane came in in mid-January, and the winter's abundant rainfall had clearly brought the browns and greens of the countryside into bold relief. Once we glided through customs, the competitive hustle for luggage seemed, if anything, less fierce than usual. The only immediate hint that "the situation" had been taking its toll was a sign showing the exchange rate at 4.8 shekels to the dollar—a drop of almost 10 percent since my visit the previous June. ("The situation" is local shorthand for the wave of Palestinian terrorism directed against Israel since September 2000.)

During my first week in the country—I would spend a month in all—I met a real-life casualty of American reporting. Yoni, a gaunt twenty-four-year-old hairdresser at my neighborhood beauty salon in Jerusalem, was telling me about his obligatory trip overseas after he'd finished his stint in the army. His plan had been to spend a few weeks in New York, then take in a bit of New England. "Suddenly, one night," he said, insistent on practicing his English, "I was watching the news, and it showed Gilo under attack. That's where I live, where my family lives. It looked like war. So I changed my ticket and came home."

Yoni's neighborhood in southern Jerusalem is home to some 40,000 Israelis. Several months into the *intifada*, Palestinian militias had shelled it repeatedly from the adjacent Arab village of Beit Jala. But the moment he arrived back in Gilo he realized that the "war" being shown in New York was no more or less serious than other, similar incidents being reported nightly on Israeli television. Within a couple of weeks, the terrorist militias had been cleared out of Beit Jala by the Israeli army. Nonetheless, Yoni seemed not unhappy to be back; in a tight economy, he felt lucky to have work, and

Ruth R. Wisse *teaches Yiddish literature and comparative literature at Harvard and is the author most recently of* The Modern Jewish Canon, *forthcoming in paperback from Chicago. Her "On Ignoring Anti-Semitism" appeared in the October 2002* Commentary.

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given "the situation," he would just as soon be home.

During my stay, I saw reports about Americans who had come to learn from Israel's experience with terrorism. Teams of American policemen were studying preventive measures and emergency procedures. On one news segment, American journalists underwent a form of basic training in case they got clearance to accompany U.S. soldiers into Iraq. One of the trainees—a little sheepishly, I thought—said to his Israeli interviewer, "You don't need this kind of preparation; you've all been through the army yourselves."

From watching television it occurred to me that we Americans might also learn something about how to cover threat and grief. The thousands of armed attacks in Israel since September 2000 have resulted in some 730 dead and over 5,000 injured—3,595 of them civilians. Israeli broadcasters report in detail on both thwarted and executed acts of terrorism, stating the precise numbers of dead and wounded and whether the perpetrators were killed, captured, or at large. To ensure trust, they keep the reports factual and their voices steady, playing down the disruptions to everyday life. At army funerals, soldiers lost in the line of duty are shown being eulogized formally and individually, then laid to rest by their families, friends, and comrades under identical tombstones. There is no inflated flirtation with the national peril, no dramatization of an incident to justify its inclusion as "news." Had Yoni been watching the shelling of Gilo on Israeli television, he would have been induced, like his fellow citizens, to carry on as usual.

So it was not so strange that while in Israel I felt exceptionally secure. In whatever concerns standing up to evil, the Jews have long had much to teach the rest of the world, but never quite as much as Israel does now. Back home in Cambridge, my city council was preening itself on having declared ours a "city of peace." Among the Harvard faculty, the only concern for America I had heard expressed since 9/11 was over the possibility that the Patriot Act might encroach on the freedoms and privacy enjoyed by members of the university community. I pray that my life will never depend on the intervention of these moral eunuchs, who have extended a canopy of olive branches over whichever anti-American tyrant chooses to tear the world apart.

It is hard to describe the grit of Israeli teenagers who turn themselves into soldiers for the two to five years when—like most of their counterparts in America—they would much rather be doing almost anything else. But let no one dare tell an Israeli that he is brave. That is like instructing him that he must show courage if he intends to survive. For most of them, it is, rather, a matter of not yet having known the luxury of weakness. The curious effect is to breed not grimness but a peculiarly local brand of optimism: if Israelis used to say, "it will be all right," the Hebrew phrase now in currency is the more cautious "slowly, slowly."

I arrived in Israel two weeks before the national election on January 28. To get myself oriented, I watched the party commercials that ran before and after the evening news. The parade of self-advertisement, intended to guarantee equitable exposure, seemed better designed to produce equal indifference. But it did let me check out the field.

I learned that there were 27 parties in contention; despite many attempts to raise the bar, any candidate able to muster around 50,000 votes still can get himself elected to Israel's parliament, the Knesset. The list included a Green party (ecological), a Green Leaf party (for the legalization of marijuana), a Communist party, and a party for Men's Rights. I counted three explicitly religious parties, several parties targeting the more than 600,000 recent immigrant-voters from the former Soviet Union, and three explicitly Arab parties. Commercials for two of those three reveled in images of Palestinian rioters. In a region of the world without a single Arab democracy, some Arab politicians in Israel complain that they do not have democracy enough: that is, the Jewish state still prevents them from bringing it down.

The pundits were calling this election the most useless in Israel's history. As they were quick to point out, the coalition government of Ariel Sharon had collapsed for no good reason, compelling Israelis to go to the polls for the fifth time in a decade. As if to underscore the point, the hottest campaign issue appeared to be not the face-off between the two main parties, Likud and Labor, but the rise of the wild-card party Shinui led by a former journalist, Yosef "Tommy" Lapid. Shinui (Hebrew for "change") was campaigning against neither Left nor Right but against the Orthodox Sephardi party Shas, which had formed the third largest component in the previous government. Shinui, in turn, was being targeted by Meretz, the left-of-Labor party headed by Yossi Sarid that was on the brink of losing its constituency to this much less ideologically rigid protest group.

As for the two major parties, only one of them, to judge from the ads, seemed to be actively contending for power. By rights, Sharon ought to have

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been the one on the ropes. He was threatened with scandal: according to a leaked justice-ministry document, the police were investigating Sharon and his sons in connection with a $1.5 million loan from a South African businessman, presumably to cover payback of illegal campaign funds from an earlier election. The economy was bleeding, unemployment was rising, daily news reports featured soup kitchens and factory shut-downs. Despite very tight security, the local death toll had kept rising, and the fact that most of the casualties were now soldiers rather than civilians brought little comfort to a nation of citizen-soldiers.

But there was Likud, running its campaign on a message of strength—we have strength in unity, and we will achieve unity through strength. Benjamin Netanyahu, Sharon's chief internal rival, stood dutifully beside him in TV spots of Likud stalwarts as a kaleidoscope of faces representing a cross-section of the Israeli public delivered the identical message: the nation wants Sharon. By contrast, the campaign strategy of Amram Mitzna, Labor's new leader, seemed to be based on soliciting the votes of Belgian jurists or *New York Times* editorialists, rather than of Israelis in their current mood. "We will not enter a coalition government," Mitzna proclaimed. "It's either us, or them." By "them" he meant Likud, not the terrorists.

The more Mitzna blustered in defiance, the more Sharon played the conciliatory elder statesman, proclaiming his, and the citizenry's, "disappointment" with Labor's insistence on placing partisan politics above the public good. As the campaign progressed, the same sense of disappointment came to be voiced openly by members of Mitzna's own party, who were afraid of losing their seats as they watched Labor plummet in the polls. Indeed, the only real challenge to Sharon was being mounted on the Right, from the National Union party, which opposed any concessions to the Palestinians on the grounds that they remained dedicated to Israel's destruction.

Watching this campaign unfold reinforced my own strong preference for a two-party system, where you learn to vote for the lesser of evils. When special-interest groups are needed in order to form a coalition, they tend either to hold government hostage to their demands or to bring it down altogether. Following my own logic, I felt sure most people would vote either Likud or Labor, thus working to ensure the country's political stability. Instead, everyone I knew seemed to be acting out some private pique. One Israeli of my acquaintance, hitherto a staunch Laborite, was so angry at his party for undermining its own candidate that he had decided to "punish" it by voting Meretz. Another, a hawk if there ever was one, was so enraged by the military deferments claimed by Orthodox yeshiva students that he was voting Shinui. A third, who had always gone with the National Religious party ("Both the Army and Faith") was sufficiently unhappy with its current leader as to throw his support to Natan Sharansky's party of immigrant rights. Sharansky was also endorsed by the *Jerusalem Post*, in general a supporter of Sharon.

My bafflement increased in conversation with strangers. At an adjoining table at a café in downtown Jerusalem sat two young men in Orthodox garb discussing business. One of them took a call on his cell phone, leaving his companion to fall prey to my curiosity. "Excuse me," I said, "and please don't feel obliged to answer, but would you consider telling me how you intend to vote?" The young man, unruffled, named two Orthodox parties, saying he had not yet made up his mind between them. There was a pause, and I assumed the conversation was over, when he asked, "Do you have a suggestion?" My secular Israeli cousins, to whom I related this incident, were more surprised that a "black hat" would consult me on his vote than by the political waywardness of their fellow citizens at such a critical moment in their nation's history.

But when the results were in, it was clear I had been speaking to the wrong people. The election was indeed one of the most decisive in Israel's history. If Sharon were to prove sufficiently skillful, it might also turn out to be one of its most significant. Fully 70 of the 120 seats in the Knesset went to parties of the Right. Likud doubled its own seats from 19 to 38, while Labor dropped from 25 seats to 19 and Meretz fell even more precipitously from ten seats to six. The relatively low voter turnout—68 percent—may be attributed to the discontent of Left-leaning voters who could no longer support their accustomed parties but could not yet bring themselves to vote for the alternative. They voted neither "us" nor "them."

WHAT HAD happened? Evidently, ignoring every other issue, the Israeli public had conceived of this election as a referendum on the Oslo accords of 1993, and had charged the political parties most implicated in that debacle with belated responsibility for its outcome. Without drawing attention to the fact, voters had found a way of finally repudiating the legacy of Yitzhak Rabin.

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Although it is now forgotten, the late prime minister had been on his way to defeat at the polls when he was fatally shot by the far-Right fanatic Yigal Amir in 1995. The killer, by reinforcing the image of a uniformly extremist internal opposition, effectively precluded further criticism of the policies that many Israelis were beginning to think had put the nation at risk. The assassination did more than take the life of an elected leader, which was crime enough; by creating a martyr to "peace," it also prevented the public from rendering its own verdict on his leadership.

For all these years, leftists had tried to use Rabin's assassination as a means of blocking any confrontation, by themselves as well as by others, with their own failed policies. Now the voters had decided to do the job for them. In retrospect, the most telling feature of the election was the total absence of the "peace" slogan. A decade ago, urged on by the Clinton administration, Israel's leaders had taken a desperate, death-defying "risk for peace"; so high a price had been paid for that reckless act that, even if no one was now inclined to scold them for it, neither was anyone about to let the charade continue. Like addicts recovering from a near-fatal overdose, Israelis had become disinclined to indulge false hopes. Now it remained for Sharon to form a workable coalition and try to vindicate the public's common sense.

The election results, then, were a sign neither of delusion nor of despair but instead of that same persistent species of Israeli optimism—in a setting where optimism had no right to exist. When I was in the country, there were indisputably more Israeli families in mourning than even the previous year. Diners were paying an additional two shekels per meal for the armed guards at the entrance to every restaurant. The U.S. State Department's warnings against travel to the Middle East had dried up tourism and crippled related sectors of the economy.

During my stay, I read in the *New Yorker* one of those gloomy obituary pieces for the city of Jerusalem that have become a sub-genre of the local literature. In it, Ari Shavit, a native Jerusalemite and one of Israel's leading journalists, wove two motifs into a narrative of civic decline: the beautiful people had fled, abandoning the city to the Arabs on the one hand and the "ultra-Orthodox" on the other, while suicide bombings and other brutalities had succeeded in destroying the spirit of those few, like him, who still remained.

My own, contrasting impression of Jerusalem was formed by Jews with no intention of leaving. I was living in my brother's newly purchased apartment near the Jerusalem Theater. Where Shavit identified himself as the sole remaining Jerusalemite out of the twenty children and grandchildren his grandparents had after they arrived in the late 1920's, I could not help noting that no fewer than ten direct descendants of my grandparents, not one of whom had ever left Poland, were now living or getting a toehold in the city. Nor were they alone. My seatmate on the flight to Israel was a forty-something New Jerseyite who had moved to Jerusalem seven years ago. He told me he had been looking for a higher standard of living. I corrected him: "Surely you mean a better quality of life." "That, too," he conceded, going on to explain that even though some of his American friends earned as much as $200,000 a year, they had to shell out $15,000 per child for Jewish schooling, whereas for him, educating his four children cost a mere 5,000 shekels (just over $1,000) a year. I suppose he might qualify as "ultra-Orthodox" among some of Shavit's refugee friends in Tel Aviv, but based on the way he dressed and the name of his children's school, I would call him a moderately observant Jew.

Shavit is right about one thing: it is a strain to try to live normally when you know that your neighbors are hunting you for sport. Late one afternoon, my niece's twelve-year-old son accompanied me to Emek Refaim, the hip Jerusalem street where we were to pick up his sister from ballet class. He arranged our meeting with her by calling her cell phone on his; both phones were a recent gift from their father and, it struck me, a luxury for two young children. Ben set me straight. "It's a good thing I have one, because when there was a terrorist attack near my school I could call my mother and father right away to tell them I was O.K." Another six years and he would be making the same call from his army base, reassuring himself by reassuring others.

But let me return to why so many Jews do enjoy living in Israel these days and especially in its capital Jerusalem. Every Friday evening I was invited to the home of someone who observed the commandment of hospitality, either as a religious imperative, or as a Zionist imperative, or out of local habit. Occasional cars would still move through the darkened streets, but not enough of them to keep pedestrians on the sidewalks. On the way to dinner I met people returning from synagogue—these come in as many varieties as orchids—and on my way back home I would see clusters of teenagers

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everywhere, in front of schools, in the entranceway of homes, trekking up and down the hilly streets.

I would tell my hosts what a delight it was to stroll in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. They would say, you haven't known delight until you do the same thing on Yom Kippur. Of course, the Day of Reckoning, Yom Kippur, is not intended to delight: what they meant was that if Judaism is a sustaining way of life, it is a privilege to live it among those whom it sustains. The late professor Khone Shmeruk, who lived in Jerusalem as a thoroughgoing secularist, once told me that on the Sabbath he wrote in longhand because he did not want the noise of his typewriter to disturb his neighbors' rest. This second-hand Sabbath is the reverse of second-hand smoke: passively curative.

Sabbath rest must be especially precious in a society that is forever fixing itself in ways large and small. Some recent Jerusalem initiatives: my cousin's husband, deciding that the country was lacking in laughter, designed a private comedy show to entertain his friends and neighbors. A foundation, declaring a general insufficiency of civility, invited the young volunteer workers of all the political parties—each group in its distinctive T-shirts—to a giant pre-election party. A woman who had intuited the existence of Israelis more devoted to the country's well-being than to their separate ideological convictions founded a new journal to tease this latent consensus into being. A non-observant professor of law and an Orthodox rabbi teamed up to draft a novel approach to resolving the tug-of-war between secularism and religion. An educator established an experimental two-track school where children from self-styled observant and self-styled secular homes could take most of their classes together. In short, "abandoned" Jerusalem has been a hub of creative exertion, though it may not suit the bias of journalists to say so.

ONE FRIDAY noon, as the city was beginning to close down, I met the writer Aharon Appelfeld for lunch at the faculty club of the Hebrew University. The sun-filled room, its doors open to the garden, was a far remove from our common birthplace, the city of Czernowitz, once Romania, currently Ukraine. Between the two of us, my childhood had been the more fortunate by far; I was brought by my parents to North America, while Appelfeld survived World War II in Europe before arriving alone as a fourteen-year-old in Palestine. In our different ways, though, we had both been introduced to a vital Yiddish culture, only to see both culture and language slip away before our eyes into the cemeteries and the archives.

It was this loss that we talked about. Appelfeld felt it more keenly than I. He missed the Yiddish writers whom he had met when he came to Israel, and he thought the Jewishness of the country less robust than it had once been. But that is probably what those writers had felt, too, as had their predecessors before them. That very morning, before meeting Appelfeld, I had been reading a letter by the Yiddish poet Jacob Glatstein in which he begged off attending one more meeting of Yiddish writers. This old Jew, another old Jew . . . a few gray heads planning and utopianizing. Glatstein believed that the light was going out in God's tent.

The impression of declining vitality may be indigenous to the Jewish tradition, according to which there has been a falling-off in every generation since Moses. In that sense, I guess I buck the tradition. I could not have wanted for any more intense experience than talking with Aharon Appelfeld about the Yiddish writers we both knew, then going our different ways to greet the Sabbath in Jerusalem.

The very next night, I attended a bar-mitzvah party on the outskirts of the city. It felt, in many respects, very much like a similar celebration I had recently attended back in Boston. The budding young adults clustered around the DJ at one end of the hall, while the adult adults tried to escape his noise at the other. Those guests who happened to be parents of the bar-mitzvah boy's classmates looked past you in conversation to see whether their offspring were socializing. So far, so familiar. What made this celebration special were the words that the mother of the bar-mitzvah boy addressed to her son.

"You probably know already," she said, "that it is hard to be a Jew. It is harder still to be a Jew in Israel." (As this was not a family that observed the Jewish religious commandments, she was referring to the political, not the religious, obligations of Jewishness.) "But hard does not necessarily mean bad. Many good things come through difficulties met and overcome. For example, raising you was sometimes hard, but well worth the effort." There was more along the same lines, more beautifully put than my awkward paraphrase, and then: "May you learn to appreciate the hard-won pleasures of being a Jew."

I had no idea how others received her message, but in me it reinforced exactly that strange sense of optimism I had felt since arriving in the country—the sense of being among people who faced the truth and were not prey to self-pity.

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The Peace Index Project at Tel Aviv University surveys the adult Israeli public periodically to ascertain how many of them at any given moment believe the Palestinians are ready for peaceful accommodation. Keeping in mind that Israel has no incentive to go to war, and also that, for many citizens, peace with the Arabs is a lodestar, the messiah for whom they thirst, this is like asking shipwrecks on a desert island whether they think they will ever be rescued. Nevertheless, when asked in a recent poll if they agreed with the following: "Most of the Palestinians have not come to terms with the existence of the state of Israel and would destroy it if they could," 70.6 percent agreed, 18.2 percent disagreed, and only 2.5 percent claimed not to know.

These figures correspond almost exactly to those in a poll of Americans conducted in early February that showed 71 percent opposed to giving the Palestinians a state under present conditions. If accurate, the twin findings would suggest that most Americans agree with most Israelis that there is no point in helping to establish a new terrorist state when you are at war with terrorism.

As it happened, once Israel's post-election horse trading was over, and after I had returned to Boston, Sharon put together a coalition that reflected this same sober approach to the security threat. Although his intention had been to form a powerful national-unity government, with Labor joining Likud at the center, Labor refused the offer. Thus, the government that emerged, formed with Shinui, the National Union, and the National Religious party, inadvertently gave the country a more accurate representation of what the majority had voted for. The presence in it of both Shinui and the Orthodox National Religious party may yet help to bridge the internal secular-religious rift, while the fact that all the members of the new coalition, including Shinui, have called for meaningful changes in the so-called "road map" for negotiations suggests that the new government would also oppose the creation of a Palestinian state without indisputable evidence of a change of leadership, and of heart, on the other side.

Some might argue that this outcome is a cause not for optimism at all but, being so hawkish, for still more pessimism—indeed, that it shuts off the possibility of any more gradual movement toward a peaceful solution of Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. But the dovish "optimist" should ask why, in the search for nonviolent solutions, so many Palestinians have promoted a cult of murder instead of competing with Israelis in the arts of peaceful governance and civic progress. The same goes for the Arab states. Will any of them send a $25,000 bonus to the Palestinian who opens a new Arab school in Gaza dedicated to reconciliation with the Jews as they do to the families of Palestinians who blow up Israeli schoolchildren? What kind of optimism rewards thugs, or reposes trust in their good intentions?

The choice of Israel as scapegoat and target of the longest war in modern history has put more intense pressure on that country than any democracy has ever had to bear. Imagine Winston Churchill having to screw British courage to the sticking point not once but over and over again, decade after decade, from 1939 until today. It would have become intolerable. But Israel cannot get out of harm's way. Its citizens have had no choice but to become democracy's fighting front line. Short of joining their ranks, anyone curious to see optimism in action could do much worse than catch the next flight to Tel Aviv.

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Observations

Woolf, Women, and "The Hours"

Carol Iannone

The quintessentially modernist fiction of Virginia Woolf has never seemed especially suitable for translation into film. What is a director to do with all of her intermingling interior monologues, complete with flashbacks and reflections that wander hither and yon? One of Woolf's most successful novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), was made into a movie a few years ago, but the result—a worthy if awkward retelling—was altogether predictable.

Woolf herself has experienced a different fate at the hands of Hollywood. A feminist icon by virtue of her well-known struggles as a woman and a writer, and a fixture on university reading lists, she has at last proved irresistible to the big screen. *The Hours*—a movie based on the Pulitzer-Prize-winning 1998 novel of that name by Michael Cunningham, who used *Mrs. Dalloway* as the template for his own work—has won critical acclaim and an armload of awards and nominations for its presentation of the troubled lives of three different women living in three different eras, one of whom is Woolf herself. The *New York Times*, in a typically awestruck review, called *The Hours* "a sustained meditation on connection, human possibility, and the elusive dream of happiness."

What most reviewers have failed to note, perhaps for fear of scaring off potential ticket-buyers, is the strongly feminist bent of *The Hours*. But that theme has not been lost on the film's audience. *The Hours* has generated an almost cult-like excitement, especially among women. Sales of Cunningham's novel and of *Mrs. Dalloway* are soaring, book clubs are buzzing, and none other than ur-feminist Gloria Steinem has remarked of the movie that "we find ourselves thinking about it, seeking out friends who have seen it, and eliciting lessons from it for days and weeks afterward."

Mrs. Dalloway, the novel that started it all, is an experimental effort to present, in Woolf's words, "a woman's whole life in a single day." In it, she employed the technique of stream-of-consciousness to capture the thoughts and perceptions of her characters during a June day sometime after World War I. As Woolf explained in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," her famous 1924 essay on modern fiction, the chief distinction of "Georgian" novelists like James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, and herself, as opposed to their "Edwardian" peers (Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells), lay in their determination to present the unfolding consciousness of their characters, to explore not the physical and social world of an ordinary "Mrs. Brown" but rather the inner mysteries of her mind.

The focal character of the novel is Mrs. Richard Dalloway, Clarissa, a fifty-two-year-old upper-class London wife and mother who, although often joyful at the simple pleasures of life, harbors beneath the surface a tangle of fears and insecurities. While planning for a large party that evening, Clarissa thinks back to the sense of possibility she briefly felt as a young woman, when she thought she might "reform the world" and when she

Carol Iannone, *who writes frequently on literature and culture, is editor-at-large of* Academic Questions, *the journal of the National Association of Scholars.*

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shared an exquisitely forbidden kiss with her friend Sally. She recalls, too, being sought after by a young man, Peter, who seemed to promise her a more exhilarating existence, but whom she passed over for the safety of the conventional Richard.

An important subplot of *Mrs. Dalloway* concerns a young artist and shell-shocked veteran of the Great War, Septimus Warren-Smith, who commits suicide on the very day of the party by jumping from a window, an act that forms a kind of dark shadow to Clarissa's efforts to face her own difficulties. Although at first appalled by the news, she finds that it leads her to affirm her own life and even to be grateful for the bulwark her husband provides against her tremulous sense of inadequacy.

As for the movie that is a second cousin to *Mrs. Dalloway*, it takes some liberties with Cunningham's *The Hours* but is essentially true to his core themes and ideas. As in Cunningham's novel, Woolf herself is one of the characters, portrayed here by Nicole Kidman wearing an ugly prosthetic nose; her suicide by drowning in 1941 opens the film, which then jumps back and forth among Cunningham's three separate story lines, each following an unhappy, insecure woman as she faces the worst of her problems in a single day.

The first of the stories flashes back from Woolf's suicide in 1941 to the June day in 1923 when she begins writing and conceptualizing the novel that will become *Mrs. Dalloway*. Having suffered severe mental problems and having made two attempts on her own life, Woolf has moved with her husband Leonard from noisy London to quiet suburban Richmond. Though the change seems to have soothed, or at least dulled, her misery, she nevertheless feels deeply oppressed by her environs and sees Leonard in some sense as her keeper.

In a second sequence, set in 1951, we follow the story of Laura Brown (Julianne Moore), an ordinary housewife who is reading *Mrs. Dalloway* and, it seems, identifying herself with the main character. Mrs. Brown—as Cunningham often calls her in his novel, alluding to Woolf's essay—lives in a shiny new house in a shiny new Los Angeles suburb. She has a doting if uncomprehending husband, a loving little boy, and another child on the way, but she is, like Mrs. Dalloway, lacking in inner confidence, and, like Woolf, a miserable prisoner of her surroundings.

The third story, which parallels Woolf's novel most closely, takes place in New York City's Greenwich Village in 2001. Clarissa Vaughn (Meryl Streep) is an editor in a publishing house who for ten years has been living in tranquil if uninspired lesbian domesticity with her partner Sally. She also has a college-aged daughter conceived by artificial insemination. But the great love of her life is Richard (Ed Harris), a homosexual poet, dying of AIDS, with whom she had an affair one summer in their youth. The experience has ever after remained the benchmark of their greatest happiness, although it was hardly sustainable in light of their separate preferences and Richard's erratic nature.

Richard is to be honored that evening with an award for lifetime poetic achievement. But he is bitter, suffering in myriad ways, mental and physical. He feels that he has failed to achieve his artistic vision and scorns the award as a consolation prize for his illness. Like her namesake in the Woolf novel, this Clarissa is also planning a party for that evening, to celebrate Richard's award. And this Clarissa, too, is feeling a rattling sense of dissatisfaction with the mundane quality of her life, bound up as it is in trivia and details. Her low-key relationship with Sally contrasts not only with the larger flush of possibility she once enjoyed but with the sense of aliveness she can still feel with Richard, whom she knows will soon be lost to her.

Indeed, when Clarissa arrives to take Richard to the party in his honor, he has decided to die. He tells her that she must let him go, that he cannot continue to stay alive for her in such misery. Conjuring up their youthful happiness together—and borrowing some of the words heard at the outset of the film in Woolf's suicide note—he heaves himself from the window. Needless to say, Clarissa cancels the party.

The Hours has been intelligently adapted from Cunningham's novel by the English playwright David Hare, and was directed by another Englishman, Stephen Daldry. The related plots are interwoven with a definite glossy skill, and there is an elegant if somewhat contrived artiness in the visual motifs that link the stories, particularly the recurring female imagery of flowers, parties, cups, cakes, eggs, cooking, kitchens. Pleasing too is the distinctive look and feel that Daldry has given to each of the three sequences. Woolf's story takes place in the muted brownish tones we associate with films set before World War II; Laura's in a nostalgic sepia-tinted 1950's veneer, the plump vintage cars all polished to a preternatural shine; Clarissa's in a plainer, less manipulated register that makes her life look familiar and of our own time.

As for the acting, Meryl Streep is spectacular as the modern-day Clarissa, Ed Harris searing as the bitter dying poet, and their scenes together are luminous and moving. On the other hand, her Golden Globe award for best actress notwithstanding, Nicole Kidman's performance as Woolf is for the most part a one-note, zombie-like affair, marked by a scowlingly blank expression and a voice artificially cracked and lowered. Also one-noted is Julianne Moore's Laura, with her puzzled open-mouthed misery seeping from every pore. Indeed, at times the film seems to do little more than drift from one catatonically frozen female face to another. Still, with the music by Philip Glass

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underscoring the circular monotony of the characters' turmoil, the movie succeeds on its own terms as a gloomy, well-made women's weepie.

What gives *The Hours* its feminist punch—and perhaps explains its appeal to the likes of Gloria Steinem—is its effort to create a cinematic triptych describing the modern Progress of Woman. As portrayed on screen, Virginia Woolf is stymied by a repressive society, hemmed in by a culture that, after all, has only just granted female suffrage and can scarcely comprehend a complicated woman, let alone a woman artist. Though she does eventually have it out with Leonard, convincing him that they must return to London, she is obviously dependent on her husband, and sees him as her link to sanity.

The story of Laura represents a later age. Women have obtained political rights, but they are still everywhere in chains, suffering from what Betty Friedan famously called "the problem that has no name." Despite all that postwar America can deliver, and that her World War II-veteran husband is proud to provide, Laura is deeply depressed, agonizingly anxious, suffocated by her mid-century American family life. So desperate is she that, as we discover late in the film, when her story is brought up to the present, she abandoned her family soon after giving birth to her second child. In the unfolding feminist saga, she would seem to be a step closer to liberation than Woolf—a woman capable of leaving her husband and children and managing somehow to live on her own.

Finally, with the story of Clarissa, we have the full flush of freedom in our own day. Although struggling with insecurity and unhappiness, Clarissa has obviously had choices unavailable to the other two women. She can earn a good income, live openly and unremarkably with another woman, and even have a child apart from a man. In the unfolding "herstory" of *The Hours*, this means that her life can turn out more happily than the others', a point brought home in the closing scenes in which we discover that none other than Laura—the desperately unhappy housewife of 1950's Los Angeles—is the mother who deserted the child who would grow up to be the tormented Richard.

A curious but unmistakable theme of the women's history presented by *The Hours* is the redemptive possibilities of lesbianism. When, in the first story, Virginia's lively sister Vanessa comes for tea with her three children, Virginia kisses her full on the mouth, an effort, the film suggests, to draw vitality from another woman as well as to give expression to her own confused sexual identity. Similarly, in the second story, when a neighbor drops in on Laura, the bedraggled housewife kisses her on the lips in an attempt to feel connection and, clearly in this case, out of repressed lesbian longing. As for Clarissa, having finally been jolted by Richard's suicide into an appreciation of her own substantial contentment, she seals her self-knowledge by bestowing a long, grateful, determined kiss on her neglected partner Sally. Of all the female-female kisses in the film, this is the one that represents true and ultimate fulfillment, like the finally completed chord of *Tristan und Isolde*. The thrill of her long-standing heterosexual flirtation behind her, Clarissa can at last settle into stable domesticity.

THOUGH *The Hours* does not claim to speak for Virginia Woolf, it obviously draws inspiration from her work, presenting itself as an up-to-the-minute reimagining of *Mrs. Dalloway* (*The Hours* was Woolf's original title). In comparing the moral and social world of Woolf's novel to that of the movie, however, what is most striking is not their similarities but their radical divergence.

Despite her own personal torments and her ambitions as a literary modernist, Woolf remained enough of a Victorian to want to affirm the institutions of ordinary life, even to suggest their larger normative dimensions. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa has her moments of anxious self-doubt, to be sure, but she is redeemed ultimately by the conventional choices she has made. We learn that her girlhood friend Sally—the one with whom she shared that forbidden kiss—is now a happily married mother. We discover that Peter, the suitor who promised Clarissa a deeper, more stimulating existence, is something of a failure. And we get to know her boring but dutiful husband Richard, a conservative Member of Parliament (of all things) whom Woolf portrays with genuine sympathy. Perhaps most emblematic of all, Woolf's Clarissa, having meditated privately on the terrible suicide of Septimus, goes back to the party she has planned and the larger social world that it represents. As we are told when Clarissa returns to her guests, in what is the final line of *Mrs. Dalloway*: "For there she was."

The Hours, too, concludes on something of an affirmative note, with the quiet satisfaction of the modern-day Clarissa. As one rapturous critic put it, it is a film about the "hard-won celebration of life as it is meant to be lived, hour by hour, moment by moment." But what dominates the film is something quite different—not the "hard-won" happiness of its female protagonists but the very unhappy connections from which they must break free.

This Clarissa, unlike Woolf's, never makes it to her party. This is true not just in the literal sense that she must, after Richard's suicide, cancel the celebration intended to honor him but also in a deeper sense—she becomes whole by shedding at last the one part of her life, a lingering romantic attachment to a man, that has the look of a traditional commitment. In this, as in its portrayal of the natural family as a soul-crushing prison house, *The*

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Hours seems to suggest that only in a world from which men have been ruthlessly banned or dispatched can women hope to achieve a modicum of genuine happiness.

Virginia Woolf, at least on the evidence of her art, knew better. But it is not the social world of *Mrs. Dalloway*, with its sober appreciation of traditional relations between men and women, that the makers of *The Hours* have chosen to dramatize. Rather, it is the tragic story of Woolf's own suicide, an episode that serves as a framing device for the whole movie. As *The Hours* begins, we see Woolf walking toward the river where she will drown herself; the closing shot shows her in the act yet again, her head just above the water.

The "lesson" we are to draw from this, I suppose, is that women must bravely confront the choices before them: either take the radical, even countercultural, paths that are necessary to bring them contentment, or end their misery. For my part, I cannot help thinking that Woolf—not the gray, disgruntled, emotionally wracked little wren portrayed in *The Hours* but the writer and thinker—had a truer understanding of her sex.

Postcard from the "New Europe"

Joshua Muravchik

THE TOWER at the eastern end of Charles Bridge, 138 steps high by a narrow winding staircase, opens onto a tight walkway that affords a panoramic view of Prague: to the west, the Prague castle, dating to the 10th century; to the east, the spires of the old town square, going back as far as the 14th century. "Ah," I sighed, "the new Europe."

The nomenclature of the dust-up between Washington and its erstwhile allies in the "old Europe" of Paris and Berlin can strike an American in central Europe as funny. But the stakes are serious, and it was this that had brought me to Prague, one stop in a State Department-sponsored tour to discuss U.S. policy toward Iraq with journalists, students, and intellectuals in both halves of the former Czechoslovakia as well as in Romania and Albania. As it happened, I was in the region just when the tug-of-war reached a climax in French President Jacques Chirac's tirade against the former Communist states whose leaders had signed statements of support for the U.S. position. They had "missed an opportunity to shut up," Chirac said, warning that they might thereby have also jeopardized their entry into the European Union.

To states that have reveled in their liberation from an "alliance"—the Warsaw Pact—in which their job was always either to shut up or to say what they were told, this scolding did not go down well. In Prague, the main center-right newspaper, *Lidove Noviny*, responded by publishing a 1970's photo it had dug out of an archive; the photo showed a young Chirac and Saddam Hussein in lab coats touring the French-built Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak that an Israeli air strike would demolish in 1981. In Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, a leading daily ran an editorial headed "Leonid Ilyich Chirac," invoking the notorious Brezhnev doctrine put forward to justify the 1968 reoccupation of Czechoslovakia, under which the sovereignty of the Eastern European states was formally subsumed to the USSR. In Bucharest, Romania, one paper ran the headline "Le Petit Big Brother." Another might have spoken for the whole region when it editorialized: "Did the Europeans and especially the French ever understand what Romania endured under Communism? Roma-

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK, *a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of* Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism. *His "Facing Up to North Korea" appeared in last month's* COMMENTARY.

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nia is desperate. . . . Romania sees in the United States at this time the strongest guarantee that it won't have to return to the quagmire."

Several of my interlocutors asked me eagerly about rumors that the current rift might lead to the withdrawal of American military bases from Germany and their relocation further east—i.e., to one of their own countries. What better guarantee of their safety from the "quagmire"? But the most seasoned leaders in the countries I visited were the Czechs, and some of the shrewdest Czechs with whom I spoke were less glib about the matter. A continuation of the Washington-Berlin split would be very uncomfortable for their country, they said. Although identifying closely with the U.S.—they have worked hand-in-glove with America on such distant issues as human rights in Cuba and China, and it was President Vaclav Havel's signature on one of the statements of support for American policy that particularly incensed Chirac—the Czechs could not disregard opinion in Germany, their overshadowing neighbor and principal foreign investor. It is not that they identified so closely with the Germans; on the contrary, given their bitter experience, they liked having American troops stationed inside Germany, and wanted them to stay there.

They worried, too, lest their own younger generation, growing up free in an American-dominated world, might come to mirror Western Europe's resentments of American power. I caught a glimpse of this possibility not among the Czechs but in an auditorium of Slovak undergraduates I addressed in Trnava, where some asked baiting questions to the approving giggles of many of their mates. "We used to be a Russian colony," sauced one, "and now we are an American one." As I began to point out the differences, he interrupted: "I didn't say we don't like it." As this suggests, their tweaking lacked a hard edge, but neither did they express the respect and gratitude that one readily finds among those old enough to have clear memories of life under Communism.

IN ROMANIA, the process of becoming part of the West, and thus of taking for granted the benefits this confers, is less far advanced. Romania was more isolated than most states under Communism. Its dictator, Nicolae Ceaucescu, had followed something of an independent path, pulling his country partially out of the Soviet orbit and thereby winning much credit in Washington, including the image of a relatively liberal Communist. But if there had ever been a moment's truth behind this, it vanished in 1971 when Ceaucescu visited North Korea and was swept off his feet by the innovative system of Kim Il Sung, in which the dictator himself had assumed the status of a god-king.

A Romanian editor told me that his magazine had prepared a special issue that year featuring reports on a remarkable new idea for Communist industry—marketing. But when Ceaucescu returned from Pyongyang, he ordered the issue killed. Instead, Romania moved to adopt "Juche," Kim's model of economic autarky, and Ceaucescu, turning his back on any trace of liberalism, became the region's most repressive ruler. (It took years for this reality to register on the West. As late as 1978, President Jimmy Carter welcomed Ceaucescu to Washington, declaring: "Our goals are the same . . . to let the people of the world share in . . . personal freedom. . . . We believe in enhancing human rights.")

Reveling in his divine stature, Ceaucescu made gigantism the hallmark of construction during his reign. The Hall of the People, seat of the Communist "legislature," is said to be the second largest building in the world, exceeded only by the Pentagon—as if the size of its chambers would lend solemnity to the mock proceedings within. As a result of this mania, Bucharest, which calls itself the "Paris of the east," seems ugly at first glance, though a second look reveals many beautiful buildings and it becomes clear that the boast was at one time not an idle one. One old building where the beauty lay in the interior was the Choral synagogue, which I visited for a Friday-evening service. The few score congregants, mostly of an older generation, greeted me warmly, happy to have a visitor from America.

Given Bucharest's identification with Paris, Romania's current pro-Americanism may seem surprising, all the more so in light of the fact that in 1997 Washington vetoed France's proposal to include Romania in the first round of NATO enlargement. But Romanians remember that between the two world wars they looked to Paris for security, linking themselves with Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and France in the "little entente." The French, however, with their Maginot strategy, proved to be more interested in what their allies could do for them than in what they could do for their allies.

America enjoys a very different image in Romanian eyes. As one Bucharest writer put it to me:

> For 100 years, the entire planet has asked the American people, the youngest people in the world, for help. Like in a Western, the bandits (aggressive empires, fascists, Communists, etc.) have ended up dead or in jail, and the cowboy—the American people—has gone back to his business till the next outlaw's attack.

The same man told me about an uncle of his who had managed to emigrate to America at the age of sixty. Until then, the uncle's life had been stultified by repressive regimes and the lack of opportunity, but, in the nearly 30 years since his move, he has at last fulfilled his literary and entrepreneurial interests. "His life began at sixty," said the nephew, adding, "I love the USA."

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ONE MEASURE of the positive sentiment toward America was the negligible turnout for the local Bucharest segment of the worldwide demonstrations against war in Iraq on February 15, which I observed during my visit. I counted 25 protestors in all, twenty of whom turned out to be from various Arab groups. The remaining five young Romanians were carrying signs they told me they had downloaded via the Internet from U.S. peace groups. They were there for the most prosaic of idealistic reasons. "Violence is always wrong," one girl explained to me.

She was very pretty, as are many Romanian women, combining the fine features of the Slavs with exotic Latin darkness and a seemingly natural svelteness. One stunning waitress who saw my party out at the door of her restaurant gave me a moment's thrill when she said, "I will wait for you every day," until I realized she was simply struggling to say "come again soon." Education in English has yet to catch up to Romania's alignment with the U.S.—although my lectures to foreign- and defense-policy specialists required no interpreters.

As elsewhere, the transition from Communism in Romania is good for the young, hard on the old. On an early morning walk I spied an old woman stopping near a litter basket, then near another. She was scavenging. I reached into my pocket for some bills, pausing for a moment to calculate their value at the exchange rate of 34,000 lei to the dollar. Before I could catch up with her, she had disappeared into a decrepit tenement doorway, suggesting that she was not a street person at all but a pensioner so poor that she had to begin her day by rifling through other people's trash.

In addition to the pains of transition, there are anxieties about its incompleteness. Although Romania's government was freely elected, press freedom is still shaky. A journalist told me she had been fined for libeling a public official even though the judge acknowledged that what she had written was true; nonetheless, as she had damaged the man's reputation by revealing his misconduct, she had to pay. (I learned from another journalist that such cases are not uncommon.) Several Romanians expressed their dismay at the decision of the U.S. Congress to abolish Radio Free Europe's broadcasts to Romania and a handful of other former Communist states. To American legislators, these countries are now in the democratic camp; but to the locals, Radio Free Europe is an important ally in a continuing struggle. Various intellectuals also alerted me to their worry that their government's support of Washington on Iraq and the war against terrorism, with which they concur, may earn Bucharest a free pass on human-rights issues, much as Ceaucescu's independent stance had done in the cold war.

STILL FURTHER behind in its transition from the past is Albania, a country that, both geographically and ideologically, constituted the farthest reaches of European Communism—and perhaps for that reason was the most interesting stop on my tour. To make matters more interesting still, I was there on Eid al-Adha. It is a great day to be a visitor in Albania—but not to be a lamb. Eid al-Adha is the Muslim feast commemorating the readiness of Abraham to sacrifice his son as a demonstration of utter obedience to God. In contrast to the biblical account, however, the son in question is believed to have been Ishmael, the progenitor of Islam, rather than Isaac. In either version, the child is spared by God's mercy, and an animal is slaughtered in his stead. Muslims reenact this substitute sacrifice each year, usually with a lamb.

I observed the ritual in the medieval Albanian capital of Kruje, nestled in the slopes of Mount Scanderbeg and named after the 15th-century Albanian national hero (a rebel against the Ottomans and renegade from Islam). Kruje has few streets, mostly stone-paved alleyways. As a guide led me through them, we could glimpse the sacrificial ritual in varying stages of completion in the front or back yards of many households. Each family performs the rite if it can afford the lamb, and surplus meat is given to those too poor for their own. In one yard that we wandered into, the freshly beheaded carcass had just been strung up by its front hoofs to be skinned. Through my guide, I asked if I might come close so as to get a good look at the procedure. The man doing the skinning welcomed me amiably but with some perplexity. Had I never tasted lamb?, he wanted to know. (The real question was whether I would again soon.)

With the fall of Communism, the Eid al-Adha festival has been resumed after a hiatus of nearly a quarter-century. The regime of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha had outlawed religion more thoroughly than most other Communist states, officially proclaiming Albania atheist in 1967. Worship was rigorously suppressed, and an official dictionary of permitted names for babies was published to discourage the likes of Muhammad and Maria. But now the state officially recognizes five religions: Catholicism, Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Sunni Islam, and Bektashi Islam.

The last-named is a form of Sufism that incorporates elements of Christianity. Its clerics—called dervishes—practice celibacy, and its houses of worship are crammed with votive candles. These places are not mosques but tekkes, small cabins, their floors covered with mats, the walls containing large nooks for the candles and decked with pictures and photos of great holy men, "babas," and occasionally of Mecca. The tekkes were all destroyed by the Communists, and Bektashis were forced to practice their faith underground. Now they

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have rebuilt them. Although nonmembers of the faith are in theory not allowed to enter, I was welcomed into the two tekkes where I stopped to peer in, the only proviso being the universal Muslim practice of first removing my shoes.

Bektashis practice a tolerant form of Islam. One of the surviving babas recently observed that the admixture of Christianity makes them a natural bridge between civilizations. And as my admission to the tekkes would indicate, the faith is practiced in a relaxed way in Albania. So are the other faiths, including even Sunni Islam. In the foothills of Mount Scanderbeg, Sunni minarets rise over vineyards. "Are those grapes used for wine?" I asked my guide, testing the level of Islamic observance. "No," he replied nonchalantly, "grappa."

The country's religious liberality owes something, no doubt, to the forced sundering of tradition at the hands of the Communists, but it has other roots as well. For one thing, with a population divided 70/30 between Islamic and Christian sects, intermarriage seems to be fairly common; many of those with whom I spoke in the present-day capital, Tirana, told me they were the products of such matches. And in a crowded Internet café in Tirana, the buzz was pierced by the loud call of a cell phone playing the tune "*Hava Nagila*," as clear as at any bar mitzvah. I doubt I would have heard the like in, say, Cairo.

Indeed, Albanians boasted to me that theirs was the only country in occupied Europe to save its Jews during the Holocaust. There were about 200 Jews in Albania at the beginning of the war, but the number multiplied a few times over with the accretion of refugees from Greece and Yugoslavia, making this the only place in the region that ended the conflict with a larger Jewish population than had been in place at the beginning.* With the fall of Communism, the few that remained, their communal institutions long since destroyed by Hoxha, departed en masse for Israel.

ALBANIANS HAVE set themselves to digging out from under one of the most repressive Communist regimes, but the task is immense. As commerce revives, the easiest business to open apparently is a car wash. I counted 23 hand-painted signs, "*Lavazh*," on the ride into town from the Tirana airport. Given the gaping potholes that pockmark the roads every few yards, my own entrepreneurial instinct would have pointed to opening a suspension-repair shop, but that would demand capital. A *lavazh* requires only a little space and a hose. The water, I was told, is tapped for free.

The other reason car-washing appeals as a business is that everything is so dirty. Roads and sidewalks are only partly paved, so wheels and feet churn up constant clouds of dust and dirt to add to the exhaust pouring from outmoded vehicles and machines—together, creating a film of particles that lines one's nostrils and throat at each breath. Mountains of awesome majesty loom over the city, so that the contrast between the beauty of God's creation and the ugliness of man's is more striking in Tirana than in any place else I have seen.

It is not self-evident why the structures built under Communism are everywhere such appalling eyesores—historically, many authoritarian regimes have produced fine architecture—but Eastern Europe is defaced by them as if by the droppings of flocks of colossal flying beasts. Although they cry out for demolition, none of the former Communist states can afford such sweeping urban renewal. But the mayor of Tirana, originally an artist, came up with an ingenious, cost-effective improvement, ordering the drab facades that line Tirana's main drag to be painted in a rainbow of bright colors. It goes a long way toward relieving the visual blight.

Other signs of transformation abound. One of the street's larger embassies, formerly housing Cuba's envoys, now serves those of the Vatican. It leads to the main square, where a multi-story statue of Hoxha has been replaced by a ferris wheel, and the accompanying pavilion has been transformed into a go-cart arena. The gleeful squeals of the children and the indulgent smiles of their parents suggest that besides religion, commerce, and aesthetics, another forbidden thing the Albanians are rediscovering after Communism is fun. The current rage of Albanian television, where deadpan announcers once droned out party-approved news, is lip-synching; early one jet-lagged morning, on my hotel TV, I watched jolly audience volunteers pretending to sing into hand-held microphones and gesticulating theatrically while recorded pop songs played in the background.

Albania's journey from Communism has the additional aspect of a reunion with the community of nations from which it was uniquely isolated. Fearing (with good reason) encroachment by his Yugoslav or Russian "comrades," Hoxha had aligned Albania with Mao's China. But when China swung toward market economics in the late 1970's, the doctrinaire Hoxha recoiled, declaring that Albania would henceforth follow the path of autarky: socialism in one (mini) country. Today, Albanians insist that theirs is the most pro-American country in the world, and they point eagerly to Gallup polls to substantiate their claim. The attraction results in part from America's role in delivering their brethren in Kosovo from the Serbs, but it also has something to do with America as the ultimate symbol of the great beyond. The main bar near my hotel sported the name "Manhattan Cowboy Pub," the coiner no doubt oblivious to the incongruity of these disparate Anglo designations.

* The several hundred Jews of nearby Kosovo had no such luck. They were rounded up and sent to their deaths.

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THE OUTSIDE world, however, is not only America and Europe. Significantly for Albania, it is also the world of Islam. Albania is needy, and some 30 Islamic charities from the Arab world have set up operations there, including the Saudi-based al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, some of the branches of which have been blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury Department for diverting charitable funds to terrorism. The Albanian representatives of al-Haramain have reportedly been identified by the CIA as Egyptian terrorists wanted in their homeland on criminal charges.

These charities have built 300 mosques and uncounted *madrassas*—schools for Islamic education. They also offer scholarships for study in Saudi Arabia. Almost any Albanian youth would rather study in the U.S. or Western Europe, but for many, a Saudi scholarship is the only way to study abroad or to get any opportunity for higher learning. Some of those who go this route return imbued with Saudi-style Islamic orthodoxy.*

This has disturbed Albania's secularized intellectuals. Some of the most prominent of them have signed a petition calling on the government to withdraw the country from the Islamic Conference, which it joined in 1992 as part of its reengagement with the world and in the hope of winning Middle Eastern support for the Kosovo Albanians. A recent article by one intellectual warned that the importation of Islamic fanaticism imperiled the "precious flower" of religious "tolerance and cohabitation." This led to his being denounced as a "pagan" in a sermon by the mufti of Elbassan, an attack that the writer rightly found ominous.

What this means, for Albania as for the other former Communist states of Europe, is that something funny has happened on the way to the end of history. Before September 11, it appeared that the main challenge lying before all these countries was the hard but benign one of making up for the time lost in the deep freeze of Communism, so that they might fully reintegrate with the West. But now the West itself is facing new dangers thrown up by radical Islam. These are directly visible in Albania, but their shadow hangs over the rest of the region as well, as American energies that might have been used to shepherd it on its passage are turned elsewhere, and as the Atlantic family divides between those who would confront the new enemies and those who would appease them.

Uneasy as the nations of the "new Europe" are with this division, there is little doubt about which position they will choose. It is not only that they want to keep close to America. They also know all too well what happens to lambs.

* For the impact of this extremist orthodoxy on another country heavily influenced by Saudi money, see "The Pakistani Time Bomb" by Alex Alexiev in the March COMMENTARY.

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À la Française

Terry Teachout

THESE ARE hard times for Francophiles, even those who draw a bright line between the splendor of French art and the squalor of French politics. Just as many Americans now find themselves reflecting sourly on the collective ingratitude of a nation whose very survival in World War II was made possible by American fighting men and American generosity, so it has been irresistible to recall the shabby behavior of certain French artists and intellectuals after their country surrendered to the Nazis in 1940. One thinks, for instance, of Colette, who blithely published her work in anti-Semitic magazines during the German occupation, or of the great pianist Alfred Cortot, who went so far as to serve as Vichy's high commissioner of fine arts and to perform in Nazi Germany.

Judith Thurman, Colette's latest biographer, blames her subject's wartime behavior on "moral lethargy." It might better be called moral idiocy—the same idiocy with which the whole of modern French history is variously tainted. From the French Revolution to *l'affaire Dreyfus* to the present moment, this idiocy runs like a blood-red thread, not always predominant but perpetually visible. Among French artists like Colette, Cortot, and their fellow collaborationists, the most troubling thing is that they were not second-tier figures but creative and performing geniuses, whose work remains to this day representative of the quintessence of French art.

But is French art itself as morally equivocal as so many French artists have been? It is tempting—perhaps dangerously so—to jump to that conclusion, especially if one is already predisposed to find the French artistic temperament fundamentally unserious. Americans in particular have long been more at ease with the unabashed high-mindedness of Austro-German culture, perhaps because the puritan strain, with its reflexive distrust of pleasure for its own sake, is so deeply embedded in our own national character. Nothing discomfits "serious" Americans quite so much as the champagne fizz of high-art-with-a-light-touch, a defining quality of French art through the ages; fearful of hangovers, such Americans are more likely to opt for what Byron called "sermons and soda-water."

American idealism similarly inclines many of us to bristle at the petit-bourgeois smugness and opportunism too often evident in French attitudes toward art and its makers. Writing in the introduction to the catalogue of *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting*, currently on exhibit at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the curator Gary Tinterow reminds us that in the wake of the abdication of Napoleon as emperor of France in 1814, Great Britain and its allies demanded of the Louvre that it return to their original owners hundreds of works of art stolen by Napoleon's armies in the preceding decade. Dominique-Vivant Denon, the director of the Louvre, replied: "Let them take them, then. But they have no eyes to see them with. France will always prove by her superiority in the arts that the masterpieces were better here than elsewhere."

AS IT happens, New Yorkers and Washingtonians have had many choice opportunities of late to reflect on the paradoxical nature of French "superiority" in the arts. Aside from *Manet/Velázquez* at the Metropolitan, New York's Museum of Modern Art is presenting *Matisse Picasso*, a show juxtaposing the painting and sculpture of the reigning masters of the School of Paris. Meanwhile, Washington's Phillips Collection and National Gallery mounted retrospectives of the works of Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard, two major post-impressionist painters whose domestic subject matter and intimacy of approach have unfortunately blinded many American critics to their true significance.

In addition, the Metropolitan Opera recently revived John Dex-

TERRY TEACHOUT, COMMENTARY*'s regular music critic, is the author of* The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken. A Terry Teachout Reader, *a collection of his essays on art and culture, will be published next spring by Yale University Press.*

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ter's superlative 1977 production of Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, an opera about the guillotining by the Jacobins of an order of cloistered nuns in which events of the highest moral gravity are portrayed in music whose unaffected charm strikes many listeners as startlingly incongruous. And Lincoln Center is currently presenting a season-long retrospective of the music of Hector Berlioz; scheduled events range from a new Metropolitan Opera production of *Les Troyens*, Berlioz's epic theatrical version of Virgil's *Aeneid*, to an eagerly awaited revival of the puppeteer Basil Twist's abstract "staging" of the *Symphonie fantastique*.[1]

Of all these artists, it is Berlioz who poses the greatest problems to those who find French art light-minded. Although, at first glance, it may be difficult to see how such a phrase can reasonably be applied to the music of a composer whose most ambitious works were inspired by the writings of Virgil, Shakespeare, and Goethe, one need only compare *My Life*, the autobiography of Richard Wagner, with Berlioz's *Memoirs* to grasp the difference between the seriousness of a world-saver and the seriousness of a melancholic wit who viewed both the world and himself with the same wry detachment. It is no coincidence that Wagner has always been more popular than Berlioz: he never made the fatal mistake of encouraging us to laugh at ourselves.[2]

EVEN MORE problematic, however, is Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-94), whose operetta *L'Etoile* (1877) was produced to scintillating effect last October by the New York City Opera. Chabrier's music has never been well known outside of France. His songs are rarely included on recital programs, and in a quarter-century of regular concert-going I have yet to hear a live performance of *Dix pièces pittoresques* (1880), his most important work for solo piano. In this country, he is known almost exclusively for *España* (1883), a riotous orchestral rhapsody on Spanish themes that still figures prominently on pops-concert programs, and as a result he continues to be dismissed by most critics as a charming but minor purveyor of "light music."

In fact, Chabrier was far more than an entertainer, as the English composer-conductor-critic Constant Lambert, himself a lifelong Francophile who labored diligently to introduce his music to British audiences, never tired of explaining:

> He was the first important composer since Mozart to show that seriousness is not the same as solemnity, that profundity is not dependent upon length, that wit is not always the same as buffoonery, and that frivolity and beauty are not necessarily enemies.

To those who find this description paradoxical to the point of unintelligibility, the music of Chabrier will seem trivial, even irritating—just as it has puzzled sober-sided listeners that a man who adored the operas of Wagner could also have produced *Souvenirs de Munich* (1886), a slapstick "quadrille" for piano duet based on "favorite themes" from *Tristan und Isolde*. Yet Chabrier himself saw no contradiction, perhaps because his temperament was as varied as his music, in which tender lyricism and rumbustious peasant vigor are interwoven without regard to conventional notions of stylistic consistency.

A civil servant with a private income who did not become a full-time professional composer until the age of thirty-nine, Chabrier was by all accounts a bon vivant and boon companion, and almost as knowledgeable about the visual arts as he was about music. (He was painted by Degas and Manet, and amassed an extraordinary art collection whose centerpiece was Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.) At the same time, however, there was nothing amateurish about his compositions, and his high-spirited letters leave no possible doubt of his complete commitment to his art:

> For my part, my first concern is to do what pleases me while trying above all to express my personality; and my second is not to be a bore. . . . Never has an artist adored and sought to honor music more than I have; and no one has suffered more in doing so—and so shall I suffer to all eternity.

No single work conveys more of Chabrier's idiosyncratic quality than "*Idylle*," a short piano piece first published as part of *Dix pièces pittoresques* and later orchestrated as the first movement of *Suite pastorale* (1888). Against a softly ticking two-part accompaniment, we hear a shapely tune whose harmonic underpinnings are unexpectedly oblique (the tonic chord is not heard until the very end of the first phrase). Especially in the subtly colored orchestral version, the mood is poised between al-fresco cheerfulness and a pensive melancholy that flickers across the soundscape like clouds on a breezy summer day.

Francis Poulenc, who as a young composer had taken for granted that Chabrier was "a minor musician," recalled for the rest of his life the first time he heard "*Idylle*":

> Today I still tremble with emotion thinking of the miracle that happened then; a new harmonic world opened up before me, and my own music has never forgotten that first kiss of love.

Nor was Poulenc alone in his intense attraction to so seemingly "minor" a masterpiece. George Bal-

[1] *Edouard Vuillard* is on display at the National Gallery through April 20, *Matisse Picasso* at MoMA through May 19, and *Manet/Velázquez* at the Met through June 8. *Symphonie fantastique* opens April 24 at Lincoln Center's Clark Studio and runs through May 4.

[2] For more about Berlioz, see my essay "An Unloved Romantic" (COMMENTARY, October 1997).

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anchine, who set three ballets to Chabrier's music, used "*Idylle*" as the accompaniment to the darkly romantic pas de deux of *Cotillon* (1932), in which a man and woman dancing together at a ball suddenly find themselves stalked by the black-gloved Hand of Fate. That Balanchine, the most profoundly musical choreographer of the 20th century, should have responded in such a way to "*Idylle*" speaks eloquently of the complex personality of its unusual composer.[3]

THE ART critic Clement Greenberg once remarked that the modernist art of the School of Paris "rested on a sufficient acceptance of the world as it must be, and it delighted in the world's very disenchantment, seeing it as evidence of man's triumph over it."

Much the same might be said of the music of Chabrier, and of a great deal of French art in general. It is worldly, even earthy, rather than spiritual; it is not idealistic but hedonistic. Instead of dwelling on the intractable sorrows of life, many of the greatest French artists have sought to ameliorate them by giving pleasure—as if to say that human existence is so indissoluble a mixture of heartbreak and absurdity that it can often be more acutely portrayed through the refracting lens of comedy. For anyone who thinks differently, French art will always seem shallow and frivolous. To others, however, a world deprived of the music of Berlioz and Chabrier or the paintings of Bonnard and Vuillard—or, for that matter, the novels of Colette and the recordings of Alfred Cortot—would be unimaginably sadder, not to mention duller.

Yet man cannot live by French art alone. For one thing, many of its makers have been too preoccupied with "the world as it must be" to imagine the world as it might be. For another, the balance between beauty and frivolity is famously delicate, and French artists as a group long ago lost the ability to strike it. Greenberg himself dryly remarked that painting in postwar France had deteriorated (one is tempted to say, degenerated) into mere "cuisine," and the same is true of the other arts as practiced there today. It has been a very long time since a Frenchman wrote a symphony or a novel, or choreographed a ballet, that the rest of the world has found compelling or memorable.

It may be that French art of the kind I have been discussing has run its course, never again to be revived. And without their profoundly civilized and humane artistic achievements to commend them to our attention, what do the French now have to offer us? The answer may be found on the front pages of the world's newspapers, though in truth the precipitous moral decline of the French is in another sense the oldest of news. Daniel Defoe first reported it three centuries ago in a brutally concise couplet that is no less telling today: "A dancing nation, fickle and untrue:/Have oft undone themselves, and others too."

[3] Chabrier's output was modest, and three albums suffice to cover virtually all of his best work. His complete keyboard music (including *Dix pièces pittoresques* and *Souvenirs de Munich*) has been recorded by the pianists Pierre Barbizet and Jean Hubeau (Erato 4509-95309-2, two CD's). His complete songs are available on *Musique adorable!*, performed by the soprano Felicity Lott, the tenor William Burden, the baritone Stephen Varcoe, and the pianist Graham Johnson (Hyperion CDA67133/4, two CD's). Most of his works for orchestra, including *España* and *Suite pastorale*, were exquisitely recorded by Paul Paray and the Detroit Symphony (Mercury 434 303-2MM). Also available is a 1941 radio broadcast of *L'Etoile* featuring the mezzo-soprano Ninon Vallin and the tenor Hugues Cuenod (Cascavelle VEL 2013). These CD's can be purchased online by viewing this article during the month of April on COMMENTARY's website, www.commentarymagazine.com.

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Arabian Fables (I)

How the Arabs soften up world opinion with fanciful myths.

Josef Goebbels, the infamous propaganda minister of the Nazis, had it right. Just tell people big lies often enough and they will believe them. The Arabs have learned that lesson well. They have swayed world opinion by endlessly repeating myths and lies that have no basis in fact.

What are some of these myths?

The "Palestinians". That is the fundamental myth. The concept of "Palestinians" is one that did not exist until about 1948, when the Arab inhabitants, of what until then was Palestine, wished to differentiate themselves from the Jews. Until then, the Jews were the Palestinians. There was the Palestinian Brigade of Jewish volunteers in the British World War II Army (at a time when the Palestinian Arabs were in Berlin hatching plans with Adolf Hitler for world conquest and how to kill all the Jews); there was the Palestinian Symphony Orchestra (all Jews, of course); there was *The Palestine Post*; and so much more.

The Arabs who now call themselves "Palestinians" do so in order to persuade a misinformed world that they are a distinct nationality and that "Palestine" is their ancestral homeland. But they are no distinct nationality at all. They are the same — in language, custom, and tribal and family ties — as the Arabs of Syria, Jordan, and beyond. There is no more difference between the "Palestinians" and the other Arabs of those countries than there is between, say, the citizens of Minnesota and those of Wisconsin.

What's more, many of the "Palestinians", or their immediate ancestors, came to the area attracted by the prosperity created by the Jews, in what previously had been pretty much of a wasteland.

The nationhood of the "Palestinians" is a myth.

The "West Bank". Again, this is a concept that did not exist until 1948, when the army of the Kingdom of Transjordan, together with five other Arab armies, invaded the Jewish state of Israel, on the very day of its creation.

In what can almost be described as a Biblical miracle, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might. But Transjordan stayed in possession of Judea and Samaria and the eastern part of Jerusalem. The Jordanians expelled all the Jews from the area that they occupied, destroyed all Jewish houses of worship, and renamed as "West Bank" the territories that had been Judea and Samaria since time immemorial.

The attempt, quite successful, was to persuade an uninformed world that these territories were ancestral parts of the Jordanian Arab Kingdom (itself a very recent creation of British power diplomacy).

> "The web of lies and myths that the Arab propaganda machine has created plays an important role in the unrelenting quest to destroy the State of Israel. What a shame that the world has accepted most of it!"

Even after the total rout of the Arabs in the 1967 Six-Day War, in which the Jordanians were driven out of Judea/Samaria and of Jerusalem, they and the world continued to call this territory the "West Bank", a geographical and political concept that cannot be found on any except the most recent maps.

The concept of the "West Bank" is a myth.

The "Occupied Territories". After the victorious Six-Day War, during which the Israeli army defeated the same cabal of Arabs that had invaded the country in 1948, Israel regained possession of Judea/Samaria, which the Jordanians had illegally occupied for 19 years; of the Gaza Strip, which had been occupied by the Egyptians, but which had never been part of their country; and of the Golan Heights, a plateau the size of Queens, which, though originally part of Palestine, had been assigned to Syria by British-French agreement.

The last sovereign in Judea/Samaria and in Gaza was the British mandatory power — and before it was the Ottoman Empire. All of Palestine, including what is now the Kingdom of Jordan, was, by the Balfour Declaration, destined to be the Jewish National Home. How then could the Israelis possibly be "occupiers" in their own territory? Who would be the sovereign and who the rightful inhabitants?

The concept of "occupied territories" in reference to Judea/Samaria and Gaza is an Arab propaganda myth.

Unable so far to destroy Israel on the battlefield — though they are feverishly preparing for their next assault — the Arabs are now trying to overcome and destroy Israel by their acknowledged "policy of stages". That policy is to get as much land as possible carved out of Israel "by peaceful and diplomatic" means, so as to make Israel indefensible and softened up for the final assault. The web of lies and myths that the Arab propaganda machine has created plays an important role in the unrelenting quest to destroy the State of Israel. What a shame that the world has accepted most of it!

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Books in Review

Redhead

Interesting Times:
A Twentieth-Century Life
by Eric Hobsbawm
Penguin. 464 pp. £25.00

Reviewed by
Richard Pipes

ANYONE WHO has been a lifelong Communist has a great deal to answer for: at least for the implicit endorsement of Lenin's "Red Terror," which initiated the 20th century's mass murder of civilians; the man-made famine of 1932-33 that killed between 7 and 9 million Ukrainians; Stalin's massacres ("purges") of 1937-38; the Gulag empire; the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939, which unleashed World War II; Mao's "Great Leap Forward" and "Cultural Revolution," which caused tens of millions of deaths; and Pol Pot's systematic slaughter of one-quarter of Cambodia's population. All this and much more lies on the conscience of an unrepentant Communist: by recent estimates, Communist regimes in the 20th century claimed between 85 and 100 million lives. On the survivors, they inflicted unprecedented misery, the dimensions of which are only now coming to light.

Eric Hobsbawm (originally Hobsbaum), the English historian who, until his retirement, taught at Birkbeck College of the University of London, is such an unrepentant Communist. The author of numerous books, mostly on modern history, and a man with a worldwide reputation, he is also a man of immense ego, for whom Communism is not so much a blueprint for a better world as a personal creed that exists apart from its reality and is validated by its intent rather than by its performance. *Interesting Times*, published in England last year and to be released here by Knopf in August, is his autobiography.

BORN IN 1917 in Egypt, the son of a Jewish cabinet-maker from London, Hobsbawm spent his childhood and adolescence in Austria and Germany. He witnessed Hitler's rise to power and reacted to it by turning Communist. His memoirs suggest that he knew little about Marx and Lenin, but found attractive, as did many others before him and since, the certitude that Marx's doctrine claimed to supply to perplexed spirits:

> What made Marxism so irresistible was its comprehensiveness. "Dialectical materialism" provided, if not a "theory of everything," then at least a "framework of everything," linking inorganic and organic nature with human affairs, collective and individual, and providing a guide to the nature of all interactions in a world in constant flux.

As these recollections make clear, he also found in Communism a means of gaining acceptance, within the tightly-knit brotherhood of its devotees, in a world that treated him as an outsider—a foreign Jew in Nazi Germany, and then a German-Jewish refugee in England. Such self-centered motivation alone explains his otherwise inexplicable lack of interest in what in the Sovi-

RICHARD PIPES *is a professor emeritus of history at Harvard and the author, most recently, of* Communism: A History *(2001) and* The Degaev Affair, *out this month from Yale.*

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et Union came to be known as "real socialism."

Hobsbawm formally joined the Communist party in 1936 while a student at Cambridge, when the USSR stood on the brink of Stalin's Great Terror. Yet there is no evidence in his memoirs that he had any inkling of what was happening there: thus, he ignores the show trials of the mid-1930's, never alludes to the fate of Lenin's close associates Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin, and indeed has no entry in his index for either the Cheka or the KGB. The horrors of Stalinist Russia seem to have been irrelevant to one who treated Communism as a kind of private religion that required not knowledge but only total faith and commitment.

Hobsbawm remained a Communist through thick and thin, refusing to opt out, as did many other intellectuals, whether in reaction to the Nazi-Soviet pact (which goes unmentioned in his memoirs), Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes in the 1956 "secret speech" (which, Hobsbawm relates, had a shattering effect on him), the crushing of the Hungarian uprising, or any other outrage. He spent his life in a world populated by other Communists or fellow-travelers and felt at home only in their company. He confesses that in his youth he could not conceive of marrying a woman who did not share his political faith, adding that when, later in life, he arrived at the point where he could contemplate "a real relationship" with a person who was not a potential recruit for the party, he realized he was no longer a true Communist.

And yet he seems to have concluded some time ago that Communism had no future. "Communism is now dead," he writes at one point, leaving behind "a landscape of material and moral ruin." It has "collapsed so completely . . . that it must now be obvious that failure was built into this enterprise from the start." In *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, his most popular work of history, published in 1994, Hobsbawm goes even further, saying that the tragedy of the revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power was "that it could only produce its kind of ruthless, brutal, command socialism." In *Interesting Times*, he hails Gorbachev for destroying the Soviet Union.

WHY, THEN, did he join the party, and how does he explain his remaining a faithful follower?

To the latter question, Hobsbawm provides several muddled answers. One, familiar from apologists for another totalitarian regime, is that he did not know. Thus, he admits to feeling "genuine grief" on Stalin's death, a grief "unsullied by knowledge." "Of course," he adds, "we did not, and could not [!], envisage the sheer scale of what was being imposed on the Soviet people under Stalin." Until Khrushchev revealed them, he had "underestimated" the horrors of Stalin's Russia.

On another occasion, he justifies his Communism by reference to his sympathy for the world's poor. But if that really were his concern, then he should have been an enthusiastic apologist for capitalism. In the Soviet Union in the 1980's, after six decades of the command economy, 57 percent of the population had to live on less than $10 a month. In North Korea, the last truly Communist dictatorship left on earth today, the annual GDP is less than $1,000 per capita; in its unabashedly capitalist southern neighbor, it is $18,000.

At other points, Hobsbawm argues, without much conviction, that he remained an active Communist from fear of nuclear war, or from admiration for the Soviet Union's "titanic achievements" and for its contribution to the world's decolonization.

But a more convincing answer is to be found in something Hobsbawm writes (admiringly) about a fellow-Communist, Andrew Rothstein: "I had the impression that for him, as for others like him, the test of his devotion to the cause was the readiness to defend the indefensible." It was such loyalty for loyalty's sake, and the unwillingness to concede that one had been wrong, which bring to mind Hitler's SS, whose device was "*Unsere Ehre heisst Treue*"—"Our honor is called loyalty." They, too, defended the indefensible, and not only with words but with their lives. Indeed, Hobsbawm shows an understanding for Nazism that he refuses any liberal, democratic society. In an interview with the BBC last October, he casually admitted that had he been a German in the 1930's, "Obviously [!] . . . I might have become a Nazi."

Throughout this book, Hobsbawm reveals neither a moral conscience nor any empathy for human suffering: he is not so much immoral as amoral, and supremely detached. At the age of nineteen, he was aware of this character flaw, confiding to his diary in the third person: "[He] has no sense of morality, [is] thoroughly selfish."

Having moved to England and enrolled at Cambridge, Hobsbawm became active in the local chapter of the Communist party, which turned into a breeding ground for Soviet spies, including Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, and Kim Philby. He was not personally involved in these treasonous activities, but only because no one had recruited him. As he confesses with breathtaking nonchalance:

> We knew such work was going on, we knew we were not supposed to ask questions about it, we respected those who did it, and most of us—certainly I—would have taken it on ourselves, if asked.

He was thus quite prepared to betray to Stalinist intelligence organs some of the most sensitive secrets of the country that had given him refuge and whose citizenship he

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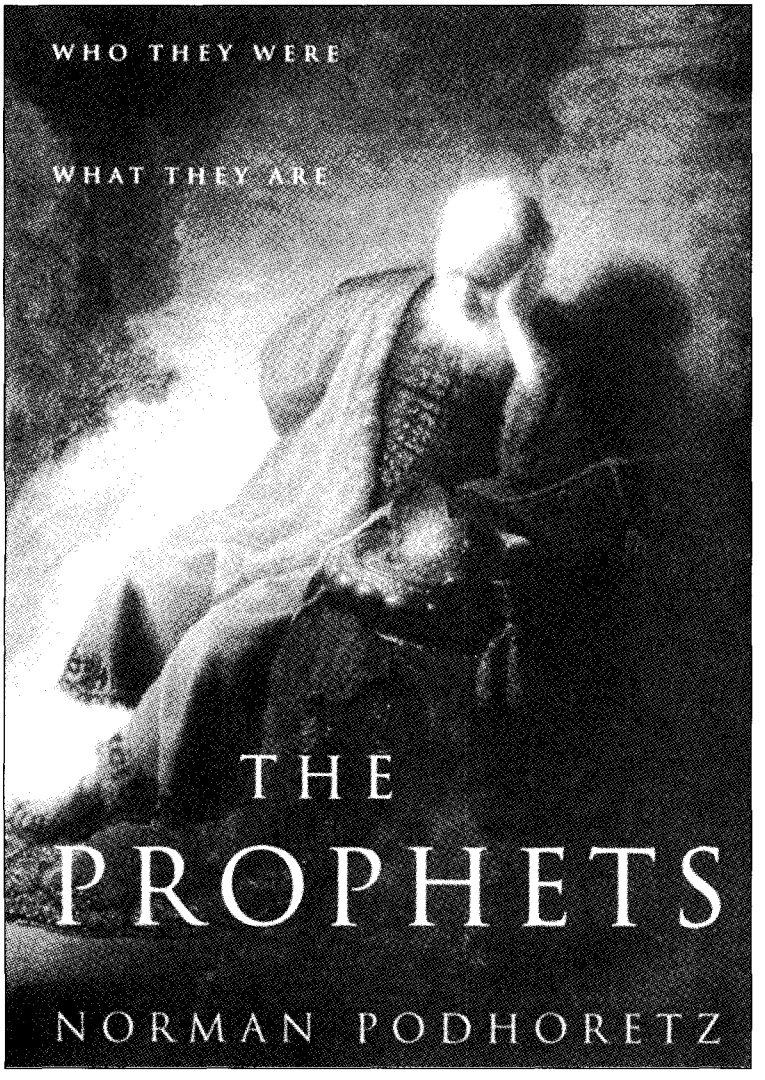

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claimed by reason of his parentage.

Loyal as he has been to Communism and indifferent to Communist crimes, Hobsbawm feels little if any allegiance to his own, Jewish people, and shows nothing but contempt for Israel, whose government he links to "fascism." At the very beginning of this book he recalls his mother's enjoining him "never [to] do anything, or seem to do anything, that might suggest that you are ashamed of being a Jew." "I have tried to observe [her injunction] ever since," he comments,

> although the strain of doing so is sometimes almost intolerable, in the light of the behavior of the government of Israel. . . . I have no emotional obligation to the practices of an ancestral religion and even less to the small, militarist, culturally disappointing and politically aggressive nation-state which asks for my solidarity on racial grounds.

This, from a man who turned a blind eye to the Gulag. Suffice it to say that his major historical study, *The Age of Extremes*, has no entry in its index for "Holocaust," proceeding directly from "Holliday, Billie" to "homosexuality." Auschwitz, too, goes unmentioned. The murder of 6 million of his coreligionists, widely regarded, and not only by Jews, as a unique crime in history, does not even rate a paragraph in that book of 600 pages.

The United States, like Israel, also fills him with disgust. He has spent much time in this country—four months every year between 1984 and 1997—yet he displays no curiosity about it. His main interests in the U.S. are jazz and gangsters. He provides no evidence that he has ever talked to or visited an American worker to learn why socialism, not to speak of Communism, has failed to gain a foothold in the leading power of what he derisively refers to—invariably in quotation marks—as the "free world." He delights in every foreign-policy defeat of the United States, hailing Ho Chi Minh, for example, as the "liberator of Vietnam."

FOR ALL the feeling of beleaguered virtue that Hobsbawm derives from his allegiance to Communism, it has cost him nothing. On the contrary: it was and is widely interpreted by his liberal admirers as a form of idealism at a time when saner Communists were jumping ship, and he was rewarded for it with grants and invitations from all over the world. Where did he not teach and lecture! At MIT and Stanford (a "superb university" but "embedded in Palo Alto," a "nowhere space of empty streets in which cars visited each others' owners in beautiful homes"), the New School for Social Research in New York, the Getty Center in Santa Monica, the prestigious "Sixth Section" of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. The Rockefeller Foundation granted him money to study anarchism in Latin America. The British Academy made him a member, and so did the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. All his books have been translated into foreign languages. He has certainly known how to take advantage of the world he openly scorns.

Yet, for a politically engaged intellectual, Hobsbawm shows surprisingly little curiosity. Apart from the fact that he never analyzes the cause of Communism's dismal failures, he relates with evident disapproval the mass defection in the 1980's and 1990's of French intellectuals from left-wing causes, referring to the "increasingly militant and ill-tempered anti-Communism of so many of the formerly left-wing 'intellocrats.'" He condemns them, regretting that their betrayal has "complicated" his relations with one-time friends, but does not try to understand why they defected. Then there is the Great October Revolution of 1917, which, in his own words, "inspired" his conversion to Communism and which he describes ecstatically as a kind of epiphany, "the central point of reference in the political universe." Yet for all the importance he attaches to it both in modern history and in his own political evolution, he makes no effort to learn anything about it beyond the trite formulas found in standard Soviet manuals.

This is as true of Hobsbawm the historian as it is of Hobsbawm the memoirist. In *The Age of Extremes*, he writes that Lenin's "extraordinary achievement" was to "transform [the] uncontrollable anarchic popular surge into Bolshevik power"; in reality, it was to exploit the power vacuum created by the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and seize dictatorial powers under the spurious populist slogan, "All power to the Soviets." The Bolsheviks in 1917, he informs us in the same book, were "essentially a workers' party"; in fact, only one Russian worker in twenty belonged to Lenin's organization at the time, and not a single worker qualified for membership in its Central Committee, which was made up entirely of intellectuals. "The new [Communist] regime did little about socialism except to declare that this was its object." The truth is the very opposite: on October 25, 1917, Lenin removed the words "Long live socialism" from the draft of his proclamation deposing the Provisional Government, but he promptly proceeded to nationalize the land and other productive assets.

TO JUDGE by the stress laid in this book of memoirs on Hobsbawm's political commitments, friendships, and activities, it seems to have been intended as a sort of apologia pro vita sua. This impression is reinforced by the scant attention he pays to his scholarly work, which, after all, is his métier: he mentions his principal historical books, but only in passing, as it were, saying next to nothing about their genesis, contents, or place in his intellectual development.

But if apologia was indeed Hobsbawm's objective, then he has not

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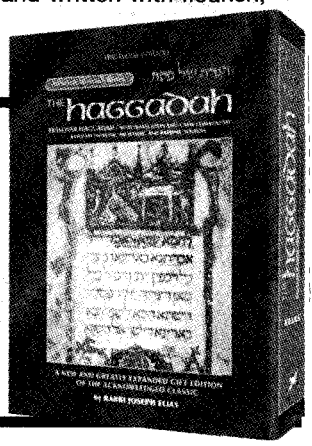

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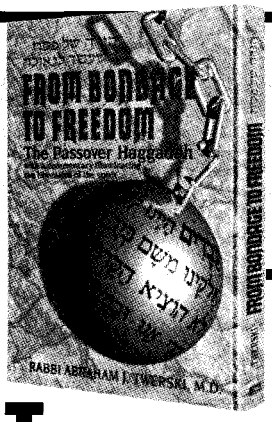

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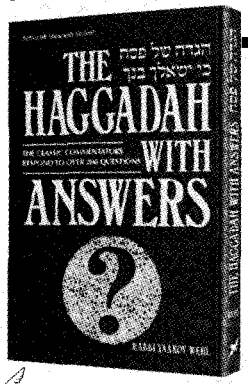

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succeeded: he emerges as too smug and too callous about the world in which he has spent his 85 years to make the reader care about him, his thoughts or his feelings. *Interesting Times* is a confused and unattractive work by a confused and unattractive man.

Down for the Count?

The Spooky Art:
Some Thoughts on Writing
by Norman Mailer
Random House. 330 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Thomas L. Jeffers

NORMAN MAILER at eighty: Aquarius in winter. Aquarius is what Mailer used to call himself in the 1960's. He does so no longer, but he has also not given up the 60's notions that once made him the guru of countercultural radicals—and that explain why fewer and fewer people today read what he writes. So dimmed is his star that younger readers may need to be told who Norman Mailer is.

Somebody important, is the answer: the writer who in 1948 published *The Naked and the Dead*, the best American novel to come out of World War II, the story of a platoon trying to regain a Pacific island from the Japanese that in the telling becomes a study of the allegedly "fascist" state emerging back home. While he went on to write a half-dozen indifferent novels, plus two very creditable ones—*Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967) and *The Executioner's Song* (1979)—his authentic talent has been for nonfiction, more than a dozen volumes of which have appeared between *Advertisements for Myself* (1959) and now *The Spooky Art*.

This most recent book is a hodge-podge of pieces culled from essays, interviews, and transcripts of teaching sessions and organized under the headings of "lit biz," "craft," "psychology," "philosophy," "genre," and "giants" (meaning such novelists as Leo Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Henry Miller, and D.H. Lawrence). Mailer's intent is to provide an "intimate handbook" for experienced writers who, he thinks, are going to need it in the years ahead. Why? Because, he rightly argues, the serious novel got into trouble as long ago as the 1930's, when our best writers stopped trying to give America what Stendhal had given France or Tolstoy Russia—namely, a picture of an entire society and strategies for "making it" therein; now, thanks to the triumphs of TV and best-sellerdom, the novel is in the worst shape imaginable.

True, novelists are still showing up for work each morning, but the greener ones could use some help. For starters, Mailer offers tips about how to construct first- and third-person narratives, and how to incorporate real experience into the imaginary world of fiction. ("For example, it's not a good idea to try to put your wife into your novel. Not your latest wife, anyway"—which leaves Mailer himself five others to choose from.) But he is more preoccupied with how to deal with publishers—do not expect them to like you personally, all they care about is money—and with how to play ego-defense against reviewers (assassins of talent) and rival novelists (enemies). In this rendering, getting ready for a career as a novelist sounds more like prize-fighting than like your local poets' support group.

Mailer was once famous for comparing himself to a prize-fighter, someone who needs strength, quickness, and above all stamina. To build stamina, he often depended on drugs, getting himself to his keyboard "stoned with lush, with pot, with benny, saggy, coffee, and two packs a day." The drugs, he claims, opened the channel between the keyboard and his unconscious. But now, when he insists on writers' being on good terms with their unconscious, he is only ringing changes on what the great modernists—Lawrence in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, or E.M. Forster in "On Anonymity"—powerfully described three generations ago. For Mailer, it is a sort of contract: he promises to be at his desk tomorrow, and his unconscious agrees "to prepare the material." If he fails to show up, his unconscious, which has never much loved him anyway, throws him over, and only weeks of good behavior—sitting at his desk whether the words are coming or not—can reestablish "trustworthy relations."

GOOD BEHAVIOR: Mailer managed enough of it to produce two masterpieces of nonfiction, the aforementioned *Advertisements* and *Armies of the Night* (1968), which is about the 1967 march on the Pentagon in protest against our war in Vietnam and which I remember reading as an undergraduate with glee, gratitude, and urgency. And it must be said that as a literary critic, advertising others besides himself and not necessarily trying to cut a world-historical figure against the might of the military-industrial complex, Mailer has often been very shrewd.

This is so whether he is discussing contemporaries like Joseph Heller, James Jones, and John Updike or precursors like Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, and Henry Miller. Here he is, for example, on Miller's supplanting of Hemingway in the 30's:

> Twentieth-century life was leaving [Hemingway's] world of individual effort, liquor, and tragic wounds, for [Miller's] big-city garbage can of bruises, migraines, static, mood chemicals, amnesia, absurd relations, and cancer. Down in the sewers of existence where the cancer was being cooked, Miller was cavorting. Look, he was forever saying,

THOMAS L. JEFFERS, *who teaches English literature at Marquette University, reviewed* After Shakespeare, *edited by John Gross, in our January issue.*

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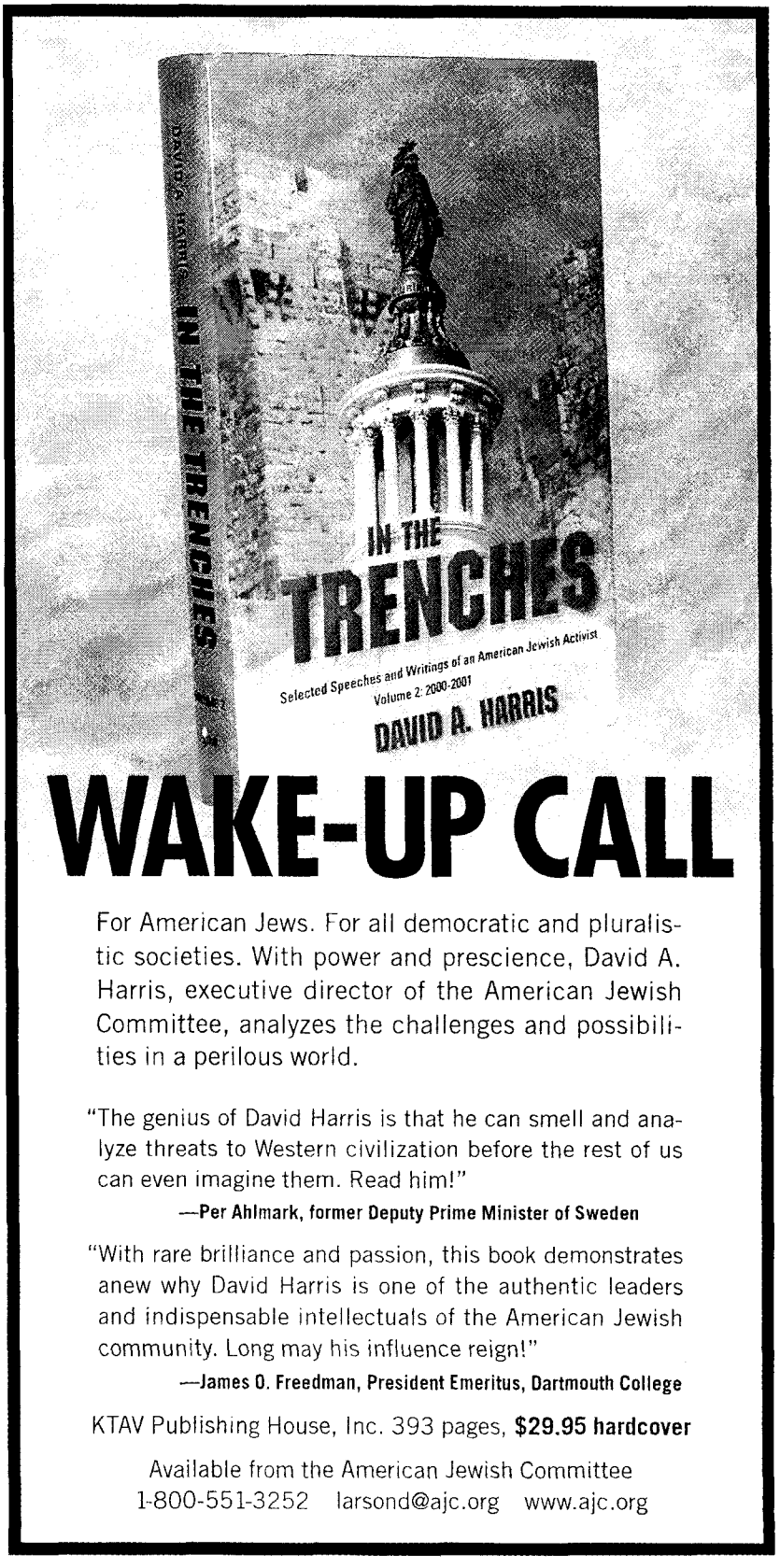
> you do not have to die of this crud. You can breathe it, eat it, suck it, f—k it, and still bounce up for the next day. There is something inestimable in us if we can stand the smell.

George Orwell in 1940 had already noted this "something inestimable" in Henry Miller, whom he described, not uncritically, as maintaining a sort of happy-Jonah existence "inside the whale" while Europe was drifting toward war. For his part, Mailer bemoans neither Miller's political detachment nor his failure to write the Stendhalian or Tolstoyan novel of society. American fiction having split into specialties, Miller chose the metaphoric sewer, which he explored in an astonishing prose—"One had to go back to Melville to find a rhetoric that could prove as noble under full sail"—that went on to influence the filthy-demotic style of Philip Roth, Erica Jong, and Mailer himself. Whether *Tropic of Cancer* is as powerful a book *after* one's young-man-in-Paris phase as it is during is another and crueler question.

Mailer is a better critic on a greater writer, Lawrence, not least because in 1971 he had to defend him against the simplicities of the feminist Kate Millett, who pronounced Lawrence guilty of objectifying and degrading the women in his fiction. Why then, Mailer asked, had large numbers of women always wanted to read Lawrence? The brief answer was that he was "the sacramental poet of a sacramental act, for he believed nothing human had such significance as the tender majesties of a man and woman f—king with love." Not my way of putting it, certainly, but Mailer has understood Lawrence's "odyssey" toward a kind of sexual sanity (and his odyssey toward political lunacy—worshipful submission to the undemocratic strong man, etc.) as well as any critic ever has.

Sadly, *The Spooky Art* contains too little such reliable criticism. Mailer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readily confesses that his traffic with drugs, and his frequently bad management of his personal and public affairs, have impaired his rational powers. He does not recognize just how bereft of wisdom or even common sense they have left him. When he suggests with a straight face that the terrorists who crashed airliners into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were "fortified by the collateral assistance of magic" (how else could they have succeeded against the odds?), or that "If a Creator exists in company with an opposite Presence (to be called Satan, for short), there is also the most lively possibility of a variety of major and minor angels, devils and demons . . . working away more or less invisibly in our lives," he puts himself on all fours not only with the 17th-century theocrats who condemned people in Salem for communicating with evil spirits but also, on the very next page, with Hitler and other Nazis, occultists who "almost certainly believed in magic" as a tool for altering history. Whether it is angels and devils or merely networks of people working together, Mailer suspects that whenever something important happens in history—usually, something bad—there is a plot at work, and if necessary he will make one up.

Mailer's obsessiveness is not just with the secret workings of the CIA or the old KGB but with the dark labyrinth of the psyche. He reprints here his essay on Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*, the 1972 film that finally gave middle Americans a chance to go to the drive-in and watch Marlon Brando simulate copulation with Maria Schneider on the floor of an empty apartment in Paris. *Last Tango*'s reamings, improvised flatulence, and mumbled opening line ("F—k God") inspired Mailer to announce that we had reached some sort of existential edge, where "we may all know a little more of what God is willing or unwilling to forgive. That is, unless God is old and has indeed forgot and we are merely out on a sea of human anality, a collective Faust deprived of Mephisto and turning to shit." Thomas Hardy said something similar in the late Victorian age, but without the fecal obsessions we correctly associate with young children.

Would I recommend this book to anyone who has never read *Armies of the Night*, *The Naked and the Dead*, or the few other titles I have put in Mailer's plus column? No, they should read his best books first. Those who *have* read them can safely skip this one, unless, that is, they want an authorial self-portrait of intermixed "genius and lust" (to use Mailer's title for a Henry Miller anthology). Alas, the mixture will only remind them how, from the beginning, the lust—for the occult, for conspiracy, and for personal triumph as well as for certain forms of sterile if not infantile sexuality—has predominated over the genius.

The Monitor

Taking Liberties:
Four Decades in the
Struggle for Rights
by Aryeh Neier
Public Affairs. 406 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Jacob Heilbrunn

A RELATIVELY recent addition to the American scene is the panoply of organizations whose sole declared purpose is to promote human rights around the world. Some of these groups have become highly influential, helping to mold public opinion and acting as effective points of pressure on the U.S. government. Though this hardly amounts to a revolution in the way American foreign policy is formulated and carried out, it is a significant new factor nevertheless.

Few figures have played as pivotal a role in this development as Aryeh Neier. In his capacity first as a cofounder of Human Rights Watch and today as the right-hand man to the financier/philanthropist George Soros, he has helped to bring into being the small army of professional human-rights advocates now deployed in Washington and in capitals around the globe. His new memoir, *Taking Liberties*, offers an opportunity to take stock of the phenomenon.

THE ROOTS of Neier's preoccupation with civil liberties and human rights are not difficult to locate. Born in 1937 into a middle-class Jewish family in Berlin, he fled to England with his parents in August 1939, only two weeks before Hitler invaded Poland. He then endured an eleven-month spell in a Dickensian hostel for refugee children while his father searched for work as a manual laborer in London.

At war's end, Neier moved with his family to New York, where he attended Stuyvesant High School before going on to Cornell, immersing himself in political literature and just plain politics. After graduation, he spent nearly a decade in and around organizations like Norman Thomas's League for Industrial Democracy (with which he became disillusioned, he says, when it tilted too far to the Right) and Tom Hayden's Students for a Democratic Society (with which he became disillusioned for tilting too far to the Left). In 1965, Neier landed the post of director of the influential New York chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Neier remained at the ACLU for a decade and a half, rising to become its top official and pushing it steadily in a new direction. This he describes as "broadening the civil-rights agenda to reach classes of people previously excluded from

JACOB HEILBRUNN *is a member of the editorial board of the* Los Angeles Times.

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constitutional protection." Along with arguably traditional civil-rights concerns—like defending the freedom of swastika-wearing neo-Nazis to march through the Jewish neighborhood of Skokie, Illinois in 1978—Neier also engaged his organization in an entirely different set of causes.

These included taking up the banner of "community control" in the notorious New York City public-school dispute of 1968; championing the right of the mentally ill to be "deinstitutionalized"; and directly entering the political arena to support the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

The last step was perhaps the most consequential for Neier himself. He undertook it not only in the name of helping to end what he regarded as Nixon's gross violations of civil liberties but in order to bring about change in another realm of growing interest to him: U.S. foreign policy. After the realpolitik of Nixon and Henry Kissinger, the time was ripe, Neier had come to believe, for a broader effort to promote civil rights not only at home but overseas.

Accordingly, in 1978 Neier left the ACLU and helped start what came to be called Human Rights Watch. Unlike the long-established Amnesty International, the new organization would be devoted less to calling attention to individual cases of torture and abuse than to countering the policies of repressive governments around the world. Jimmy Carter's elevation of human rights to the center of the diplomatic stage seemed to make this an especially propitious moment for such an endeavor. And the election of the conservative Ronald Reagan in 1980 only made the task appear more urgent, with Neier fearing that all the progress made under Carter would be reversed.

Indeed, over the eight years of Reagan's tenure, Neier's roster of troublesome governments sometimes prominently included our

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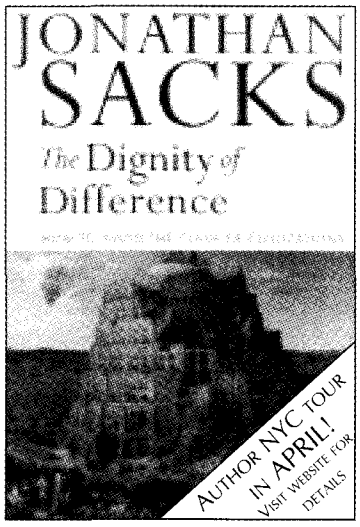

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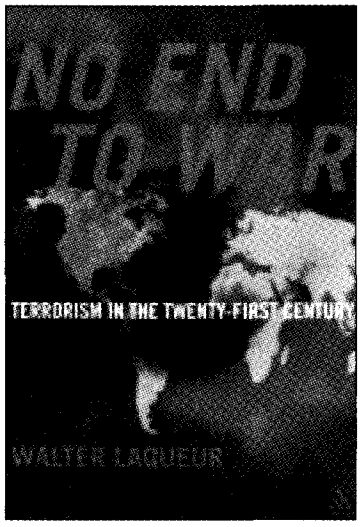

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own. As he tells the story here, Neier regularly used his organizational pulpit to denounce the Reagan administration for following a double standard on human rights, charging it with focusing exclusively on the abuses of Communist countries while ignoring those of friendly right-wing governments like Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Nicaragua, he admits, was something of an intermediate case, being wracked in the 1980's by a guerrilla war between the ruling Sandinistas and the anti-Communist *contras*. Still, the Reagan administration's approach, in Neier's judgment, was badly flawed, and the abuses *it* led to were no less in need of exposure and condemnation.

IN RECOUNTING his efforts on behalf of civil and human rights over the past decades, Neier presents an attractive portrait. He and the organizations under his control appear in these pages as a small band of wise and dispassionate activists, determined to foster justice and uphold broad principles of law both at home and around the world. But one is also struck by the gap between the picture drawn by Neier and the reality of recent history. Unfortunately, *Taking Liberties* takes quite a few liberties with the facts.

Let us start with Neier's track record at the ACLU. In the New York City school dispute, to hear Neier tell it, the ACLU was on the side of the angels, while the teachers' union, led by the demagogue Albert Shanker, was intent on fighting the self-evidently noble concept of community self-government for a black school district in Brooklyn. But not only was Shanker no demagogue, in this particular dispute he and his union were pitted against a whole band of truly vicious demagogues. Shanker was also entirely right in resisting the local school board's purge of a number of white, primarily Jewish, teachers, not to mention its demands that black and white teachers be physically separated in cafeterias. What the board was promoting was not local control; it was naked racism dressed up in the rhetoric of self-government, and the poison it injected into the civic air of New York would linger for decades.

Neier's "innovative" efforts on behalf of the mentally ill were no less misplaced. The primary consequence of these efforts, in major cities across the country, was the appearance of large numbers of deranged men and women who were no longer receiving treatment for their disabilities. Today, Neier acknowledges that "for many of those released and for their urban neighbors, [this was] a social-policy failure." But he also quite unaccountably continues to hail the ACLU's role in this fiasco as a "civil-liberties success."

Even when he discusses the more traditional agenda of the ACLU—protecting the rights of Americans from the encroachments of a too-powerful government—Neier's assessment is often out of kilter. "What is generally overlooked," he writes at one juncture, "is that the practices of American police agencies that we brought to an end in the late 1970's were as extensive and, at times, as abusive as those of the Communist governments. Their methods were similar." This comparison of incommensurables is as breathtaking as it is inane.

What this and many other passages in this memoir suggest is that Neier relentlessly politicized the ACLU, wrapping himself in the mantle of free speech while pursuing a Left-liberal agenda that tended to demonize the United States and often had little to do with civil rights. The same pattern carried over when Neier left the ACLU to found Human Rights Watch. From the very beginning of the Reagan era, he behaved as an aggressive partisan, more intent on inflicting political wounds than on promoting the cause of freedom.

Neier's efforts to scuttle American aid to the *contras* in Nicaragua is a case in point. True, he writes, the Sandinistas deserved condemnation: they restricted freedom of expression, denied due process of law in their police-run courts, and killed civilians. On the other hand, he insists that the *contras* were themselves brutal and corrupt, and deserved to be exposed as such.

Neier is partially right, but also, where it counts, wholly wrong. Some of the *contras* were brutal and corrupt—attributes not in short supply in Latin America. But most of them were just ordinary peasants, street vendors, and small landholders who were being trampled upon by a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship bent upon expropriating their property, eliminating their livelihoods, and reducing their country to the ruination of a Cuba. Nor would the Sandinistas have been dislodged from power, and Nicaragua transformed into a functioning democracy, had the U.S. government adopted Neier's false and utterly

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paralyzing stance. More broadly, Central America as a whole would not have been transformed into a democratic region, as it manifestly was under Reagan's watch. If the Reagan strategy was immoral at worst and amoral at best, as Neier suggests, how did it achieve such a welcome end?

One finds little reflection on such discomfiting questions in these pages. But neither is the failure to think seriously about the relationship between American power and American values a deficiency limited to this volume alone. It is, in fact, a characteristic of the "human-rights community" at large, reflected in the many bulletins emanating from Human Rights Watch and similar organizations that regularly denounce the U.S. itself as a major violator of human rights both at home and abroad.

For insight into that community's mode of thinking, and illustrations of its pervasive political biases, Aryeh Neier's *Taking Liberties* is, unhappily, an excellent place to start.

Crime by the Numbers

Are Cops Racist?
How the War Against the Police Harms Black Americans
by Heather Mac Donald
Ivan R. Dee. 192 pp. $22.50

Reviewed by
Jonathan Kay

In the days of increasingly violent protest leading up to the race riots that shook Cincinnati in April 2001, the cry of local activists was "fifteen black men!" The slogan referred to the number of African-Americans killed in the previous six years by Cincinnati's police force. When the figure was cited by national media, which was often, the subtext was clear: the riots, which saw widespread looting, arson, and beatings of white motorists, were not acts of random mayhem but rather an understandable backlash by the city's blacks against a murderously racist system.

Few commentators actually took the time to find out who those fifteen black "victims" were, or the circumstances in which they were killed by the police. The press seemingly did not know, for instance, about Harvey Price, who had murdered his girlfriend's adolescent daughter with an axe; during the subsequent siege of his apartment, Price had held members of a SWAT team at bay for four hours before being shot dead as he

Jonathan Kay *is editorials editor of the* National Post *of Toronto.*

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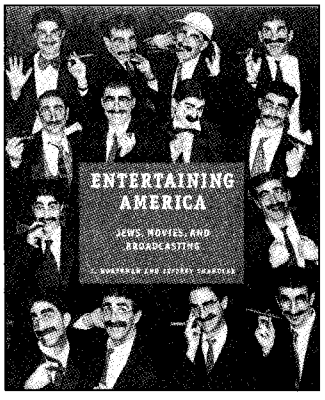
J. Hoberman & Jeffrey Shandler



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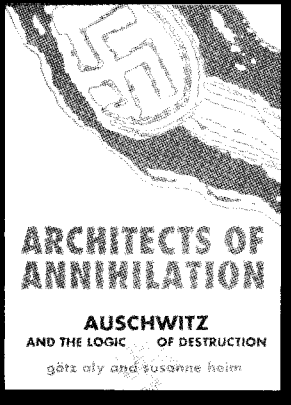

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lunged at one of them with a steak knife.

Then there was the case of Jermaine Lowe, a parolee and armed-robbery suspect spotted by Cincinnati police as he was driving a stolen car. After an eight-minute chase, Lowe crashed the car, leaned out the door, and shot a full clip of bullets at his pursuers. He was killed in the return fire. Indeed, almost all of the "fifteen black men" lionized as race martyrs by Cincinnati's protesters were killed by policemen acting in self-defense.

For Heather Mac Donald, defending law-enforcement agencies against this sort of propaganda has become a crusade. In case after case in recent years, she has published scathing rebuttals of spurious accusations of police racism. Her invaluable essays have appeared in the pages of *City Journal*, where she is a contributing editor, and have now been brought together under one cover.

THE CONTROVERSIES described by Mac Donald follow a common life cycle. First comes a flashpoint. In Cincinnati, it was the fatal shooting by police of Timothy Thomas, an unarmed teenager. Protests typically begin spontaneously, but are quickly co-opted by race hustlers eager to don the mantle of black militancy—in this case, the Reverend Damon Lynch III, a Midwestern acolyte of the Reverend Al Sharpton.

Next to arrive are the national media, lavishing coverage on the demonstrators and—in stories invariably light on statistics but heavy on unsubstantiated complaints from young black men—playing up the sins of the local constabulary. These reports encourage further protests, which again receive generous coverage—and the cycle begins afresh. The denouement usually consists of a slew of government-issued mea culpas, promises of reform, increased "diversity" training for the police, and, not infrequently, a residue of hearings into charges of police bias.

Anti-cop activists purport to fight their battles on behalf of ordinary African-Americans. Yet, as Mac Donald points out on the basis of survey data, America's silent black majority hold a positive view of the police. In interviews, residents of poor, crime-plagued inner-city neighborhoods told Mac Donald repeatedly that they want nothing more than for the police to crack down hard on drug dealers and other local malefactors. Law enforcement has answered this demand, but at a serious cost. As she observes:

> Before the 1990's, the racial rap against cops was that they ignored crime in black neighborhoods. Thankfully, such neglect is a thing of the past. But the irony of contemporary policing is that cops today face the reverse dilemma: if they respond to inner-city residents' heartfelt call for protection, they may well leave themselves open to charges of racism. [For many officers,] fighting crime is not worth risking a career-destroying bias charge.

MAC DONALD'S MOST powerful chapters are devoted to the scandal that erupted in New Jersey in 1999 when the state's then-attorney general, Peter Verniero, accused the highway police of "disparate treatment" with respect to black motorists. Verniero released a report showing that 77 percent of the "consent searches"—searches in which "the motorist agrees to allow [police] to search his car and person without a warrant or probable cause"—conducted by state troopers on the southern end of the New Jersey Turnpike involved minorities. Fifty-three percent involved blacks—despite the fact that blacks make up just 13.5 percent of the state's population.

The report was a bombshell. Protesters acted as if New Jersey's police officers had been exposed as members of the Ku Klux Klan. Then-Governor Christine Todd Whitman charged them with "racial profiling." The *New York Times* began referring casually to "racial bias" among the troopers.

But as Mac Donald demonstrates, the supposed evidence of bias did not stand up:

> Verniero [found] culpable racial imbalance in the search figures without suggesting a proper benchmark. He simply assumed that 53-percent black consent searches is too high. Compared with what? If blacks . . . carry drugs at a higher rate than do whites, then this search rate merely reflects good law enforcement.

In fact, since blacks also account for more than 60 percent of the arrests in New Jersey for drugs and weapons, the troopers' record arguably shows a "reverse" bias—that is, a disinclination to search blacks. According to a recent federal study, moreover, black drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike are about twice as likely to speed as white drivers—but are stopped by police less frequently than these statistics would appear to warrant.

As for Whitman's charge of "racial profiling," Mac Donald unpacks the accusation by distinguishing two types of profiling: "hard" and "soft." In the former, officers stopping cars target minorities merely because of their skin color; in the latter, they take a driver's race into account along with race-neutral factors like manner, dress, itinerary, type of car, and passenger load. Although, Mac Donald argues, there is no excuse for hard profiling, the soft variety is acceptable—and is precisely what the New Jersey state police practiced.

For years, Mac Donald notes, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) had been telling law-enforcement agencies that "large-scale interstate trafficking networks controlled by Jamaicans, Haitians, and black street gangs

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dominate the manufacture and distribution of crack." According to a 1999 report from the DEA's Newark office, the mid-level drug trade in the area was dominated by Dominicans, Colombians, Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, and Nigerians. Given this information, taking skin color into account was not racist—it was simply good police work.

But when the scandal broke, none of that mattered. State troopers were forced to scale back their searches; on the Garden State Parkway, for example, drug arrests fell by 55 percent from 1999 to 2000. This was a happy result for criminals. In Newark, a primary destination for northbound drugs, the murder rate spiked upward even as courts responded to claims of racial profiling by throwing out indictments against black defendants. "Whenever I have a state police case, I file a suppression motion . . . alleging that the stop was based on color of skin and therefore illegal," a Trenton criminal lawyer told the *New York Times*. "And now guess what? The state agrees with me!"

Mac Donald is no apologist for bad apples. She makes clear her abhorrence of Justin Volpe, the New York City police officer who in 1997 brutalized Abner Louima in a stationhouse bathroom. Nor does she spare the members of the NYPD who, two years later, killed Bronx resident Amadou Diallo after mistaking his wallet for a gun.

Still, neither of these killings, Mac Donald argues, was motivated by racism. As it happens, Volpe himself was engaged to a black woman and socialized actively with her family. As for Diallo's killers, they had bungled their advance on his apartment vestibule, putting themselves in a position so exposed that they had no option but to open fire once they thought themselves under deadly threat. Despite the weeks of protest that followed Diallo's death, there is still not a shred of evidence that the event was anything but a tragic mistake.

As MAC DONALD demonstrates, the basic problem faced by police is having to deal with a reality that others, including most public officials and journalists, would prefer to ignore: the vastly disproportionate share of crime in the United States committed by racial minorities. The police do not have the luxury of indulging in politically correct myths. They can either adhere to a self-imposed quota system, making sure that they do not nab "too many" blacks and Hispanics; or they can fight crime effectively. They cannot do both.

Fortunately for all of us, police usually choose the second option, even though it means putting up with endless accusations of racism. Still, as the New Jersey experience so vividly underlines, there is no escaping the destructive effect of these groundless attacks, which will end only if and when the country's elites come to terms with the true nature of the crime problem. Until that day arrives, we are lucky to have an advocate as tireless and articulate as Heather Mac Donald fighting for the legitimate interests of law enforcement.

Strong Sell

The Number:
How the Drive for Quarterly Earnings Corrupted Wall Street and Corporate America
by Alex Berenson
Random House. 274 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Dan Seligman

THE ASSUMPTION underlying this book is that numerous investors are still trying to figure out what hit them. Given the $8-trillion loss in stock-market valuations during the past three years, it seems a reasonable assumption. And Alex Berenson seems a plausible candidate to explain the calamity. A *New York Times* business writer specializing in "financial investigative reporting" (to quote the dust jacket), Berenson has thrice been named "one of the top 30 business reporters under the age of thirty" (to quote the dust jacket again, while wondering whether awards in the journalism industry have proliferated out of control).

Today's standard view of the crash is that it was inevitable—that the explosive rise in stock prices during the 1990's became a "bubble" driven by what the Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan famously characterized as "irrational exuberance." But one can embrace this premise, as Berenson does, and still sense a need to address other major mysteries about the boom and bust.

For openers, *why* did investors suddenly turn irrational? It is plainly not adequate to posit that they were hypnotized by the "new era" promise of the Internet/telecom sector, since the familiar old blue chips in the Dow Jones Industrial Average also rose vigorously (about fourfold) during the decade—if, to be sure, nowhere near so vigorously as the high-tech Nasdaq index (up about tenfold at its peak).

Additional unanswered questions pertain to the pervasiveness of fraud. To what extent were investors bamboozled by accountants beholden to their corporate employers? By securities analysts pressured to deliver affirmative judgments on stocks underwritten by their own firms' investment bankers? By executives willing to lie, cheat, and steal to boost the value of their stock options?

We have all read the avalanche of news stories about bad behavior at Arthur Andersen, Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and other enterprises that commanded unquestioned respect only a few years ago. It is still

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DAN SELIGMAN *is a contributing editor of* Forbes.

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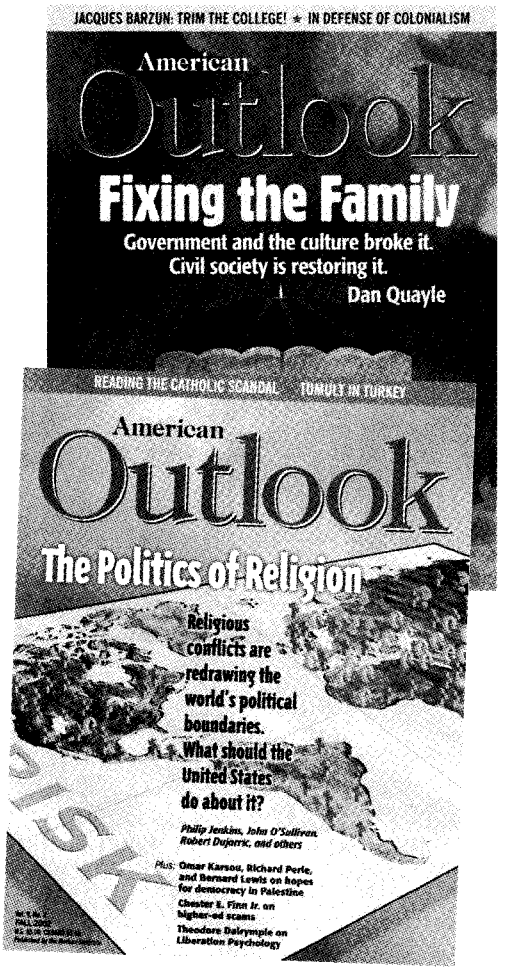
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not quite clear whether we should think of this highly publicized venality as representing a small basket of bad apples or as betokening disastrous systemic corruption of our financial markets. Berenson does not squarely address this distinction, but as his subtitle foreshadows, the book tilts unmistakably toward the systemic view.

THE "NUMBER" referred to in his title is quarterly earnings per share, and readers are told repeatedly that the "cult of the number" is what has been distorting reality on Wall Street. "The number is a lie," says a characteristically heavy-breathing passage in the book's final chapter. "We need it; we can't avoid it. But it's still a lie. And as long as investors remain too focused on the number, companies will find ways to manipulate it."

The Number is organized as an extended chronological tour of the stock market, beginning with the boom of the 1920's and ending, in a chapter titled "Truth," with the post-boom reckonings of today. In the early chapters, recurring themes are the federal government's uneven efforts to create a regulatory framework, to establish standards for accountants, and to increase financial disclosure. Incredible as it seems today, no earnings reports at all were required before passage of the 1933 Securities Act. The quarterly statements that contain "the number" were not even required by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) until 1970.

In an important but strangely muddled chapter titled "The Number Is Born," Berenson tells us that to understand the frenzied market of the late 1990's, you have to know about a prior sequence: the fifteen-year breakdown of integrity in investment research. Until 1975, he writes, the commissions that brokers earned from trading shares were fixed by the New York Stock Exchange. In the absence of price competition, brokers competed on the strength of their research efforts, which, in Berenson's judgment, reached an all-time qualitative peak in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In those days, he adds, "Institutional investors used commissions to support more than $100 million in research a year."

But all this changed after Wall Street's "May Day"—May 1, 1975. That was the day on which a Justice Department antitrust action finally brought an end to fixed commissions, ushering in the age of discount brokers and with it, inevitably, lower trading profits. When the market moved up solidly in the early 1980's, brokerage firms had less money to spend on research. Furthermore, the big bucks were now being made in leveraged buyouts and sundry other deal-making, and so the research that did get done was increasingly tailored to those purposes. Everything was a "buy," and investors were being snookered: "By the mid-1980's, complaints about the quality of Wall Street research were endemic among professional investors."

IT IS a tidy story line, but Berenson has trouble sticking with it. First, he feels obliged to note that even before May Day, investment research was fundamentally dishonest. "Then, as now," he writes, "analysts who wrote negative reports risked being ostracized." More seriously undermining the chapter's main point is a lengthy and sensible footnote that stretches over the bottom halves of three pages, constituting a kind of running argument with the text above it. While the text is going on about deceived investors, the footnote is reminding us that investment research, before and after May Day, was largely unread and generally useless except in the rare instances where the findings were unique and proprietary. The conflict between the two views is never ironed out.

As *The Number* draws closer to the 1990's, it offers a more detailed look at the market's fraud-related problems. We learn that "the sudden drop in corporate ethics" can be explained in two words: stock options. Stock options—the right to buy a given number of a company's shares at a given price after a specified date—have of course been around for a long time, but Berenson argues persuasively that the "mega-options" increasingly surfacing in the 1990's critically changed the perspective of the corporate officers who were being granted them. In opening up the possibility of vast wealth to be created through short-term price movements, options offered perverse new incentives for senior executives to cheat on the numbers.

Also getting expansive treatment is the transformation of the once-genteel accounting profession into a serious profit-seeking business, and the two big issues that have endlessly swirled about the business: (1) to what extent should accountants be held responsible for inaccurate financial statements, and (2) should they be allowed to sell consulting services to the companies they audit? Here and elsewhere, Berenson comes across as a regulatory hard-liner. He wants the SEC to address both issues by cracking down much more severely on the accountants, and he repeatedly rues the commission's inadequate budget and inability to bring more charges. Knowingly, he informs his readers that President Bush "began to gut" the oversight board created by last year's Sarbanes-Oxley legislation as soon as the media's attention was diverted to Iraq.

AT ONE level, *The Number* is a decent summary of what has happened lately to investors. But it is a fairly low level. Very little of what Berenson puts forward is based on data that will look new or original to ordinary readers of the business pages. Berenson believes that small investors need some higher level of federal protection against fraud, but

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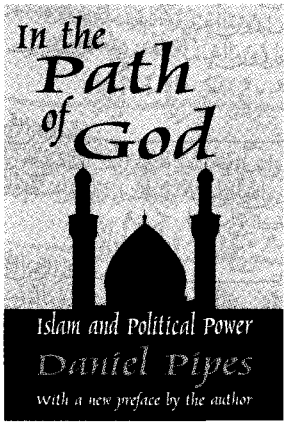

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Pioneers of Genocide Studies

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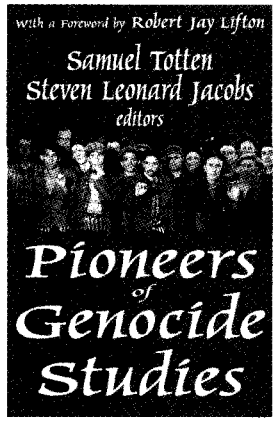
With a foreword by Robert Jay Lifton



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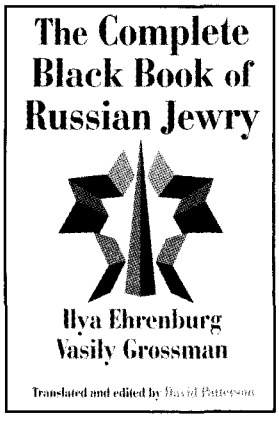

The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry

Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman

Translated and edited by David Patterson

The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry is a collection of eyewitness testimonies, letters, diaries, affidavits, and other documents on the activities of the Nazis against Jews in the camps, ghettoes, and towns of Eastern Europe. Arguably, the only apt comparism is to *The Gulag Archipelago* of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. This definitive edition of *The Black Book*, including for the first time materials omitted from previous editions, is a major addition to the literature on the Holocaust. It will be of particular interest to students, teachers, and scholars of the Holocaust and those interested in the history of Europe.

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he also believes that small investors are capable of boundless irrationality. This leaves one wondering why he thinks the protection would do much good. In any case, it is always worth reminding oneself that stock valuations are set not by irrational small investors but by well-heeled, sophisticated institutions. Exactly what many of these institutions saw in the overpriced markets of the late 1990's is a mystery unanalyzed by Berenson and still to be explored.

The Number surely aligns itself with the majority in viewing the trajectory of stock prices in the 1990's as a "bubble," but the book never gets around to defining this amorphous concept, which appears to involve a phenomenon identifiable only after the event, and which endlessly confounds the world's smartest financial analysts. As of late February, the Dow was still about 1,500 points higher than when Alan Greenspan proclaimed a bubble in December 1996. There is a case for banning the term.

At the end of his long chapter on the 1990's (titled "Frenzy"), Berenson notes despairingly, or perhaps gleefully, that when the market was topping out in March 2000, 75 percent of analysts' recommendations were still "buys" or "strong buys," and only 0.7 percent were "sells" or "strong sells." This advice, he adds dramatically, was being given "at the worst moment to buy stocks in seventy years."

All of which led me to look up what a certain award-winning business writer was telling his own readers in March 2000. Despairingly, or perhaps gleefully, I must report that Berenson did not mention it was sell-off time. Indeed, on March 18, he was telling readers of the *New York Times* that the Dow's recent sharp rise—it had been up 499 points two days earlier—"augurs well for investors over the next few months." Citing research that linked such extreme one-day gains to strong positive results over the ensuing six months, he urged that it was time to buy. "The statistics," he wrote, "are unambiguous."

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Steven Menashi is a public affairs fellow at the Hoover Institution and associate editor of the Institution's *Policy Review.*

In Martin Kramer's *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America,* he chronicles the scandal of U.S. government-sponsored centers of Middle East studies. For decades, these centers have trafficked in anti-Americanism and discounted the threat of Islamist terrorism. **The federal investment in such academic research has fostered a deliberate misunderstanding of the Middle East and promoted ideological interests at odds with American security.** Last September, the Middle East Forum, the think tank that publishes Kramer's *Middle East Quarterly,* launched a web site to document the crisis in Middle East studies and to promote honest scholarship.

Many academics can't stomach such scrutiny. Shortly after the forum's web site appeared, Middle East studies scholars began decrying it as a "McCarthy-style campaign" and a "gross attack on the freedom of expression." The Middle East Forum, they argued, threatens academic freedom. Such charges were especially bizarre coming from the postcolonial theorists, who have even invented their own slur, "Orientalism," to dismiss the work of scholars who disagree with their theories—and to intimidate Western academics into accepting any criticism of Islamic society as tantamount to bigotry.

Indeed, after September 11, 2001, rhetoric emanating from the academy ranged from the peculiar ("Towers are symbols of phallic power," explained one linguistics professor) to the outrageous (Terrorism's "ultimate cause is the fascism of U.S. foreign policy over the past many decades," insisted a professor of English). But when the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), another prominent group interested in promoting quality scholarship, published a study on such responses, they, too, were greeted as McCarthyites.

Both ACTA and the Middle East Forum acknowledge scholars' rights to free expression, merely reserving for themselves the right to question and criticize. Surely such debate is supportive of the academic enterprise; any institution committed to truth and open inquiry should not excuse its faculty from having to defend their arguments.

A large segment of academe, however, does not believe disinterested scholarship is even possible. Any claim of "truth," it says, is inevitably a product of some parochial viewpoint or political interest. "Objective" truth doesn't exist; history consists of disparate "narratives," all equally legitimate.

In such an environment, there is no possibility of debate because there is no independent standard by which to judge arguments. There is no difference between disagreement and censorship; all one can do is insist on one's own narrative and suppress opposing views.

One naturally wonders how academics who spend their time obsessively trolling others' scholarship for evidence of racism, sexism, or homophobia can suddenly be outraged when their own work is cited for anti-Semitism or a "blame America first" mentality. Yet it is clear that **many intellectuals invoke "academic freedom" not to protect the ideal of disinterested inquiry but to shield their own ideological agendas from public scrutiny.**

When professors attack their critics as McCarthyites, it is they who are trying to silence dissent through intimidation. Today, when ideas can have especially threatening consequences—our most potent enemy in the war on terror is itself an ideology— we should not let anyone squelch open debate.

— *Steven Menashi*

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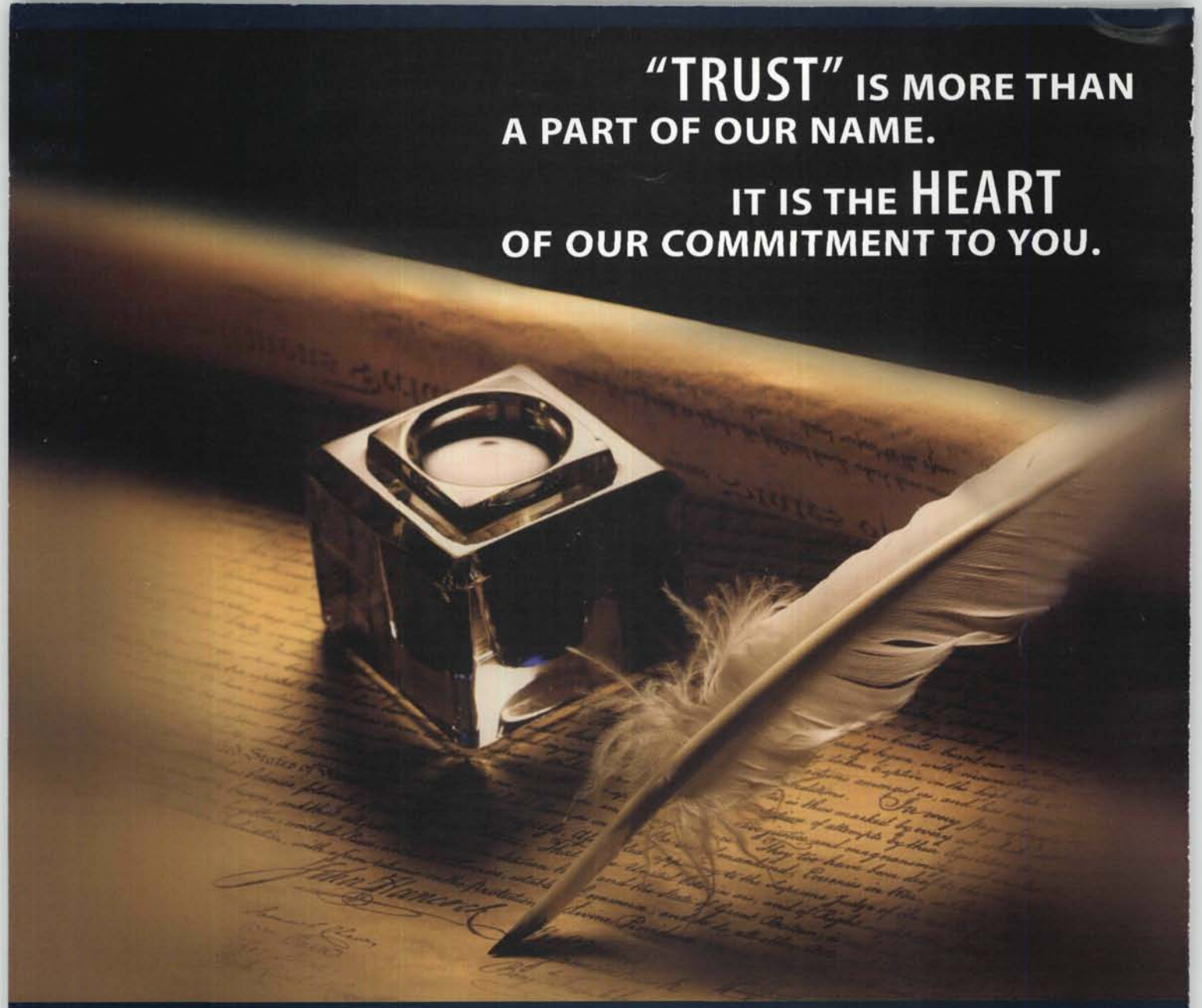

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